

# 2dartist

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134

Issue 134 | February 2017

## Inside:

- Dramatic game concepts
- **Emotive editorial illustrations**
- Surreal and visceral paintings
- **Sketching new worlds**
- Speed paint magic water effects
- **and much more!**



# Editor's Letter



**ANNIE MOSS**  
Editor

**2dartist is now on  
Instagram!**

## Welcome to 2dartist issue 134!

For this month's interviews, Ashley Mackenzie shares her highly emotive illustrations for books and magazines, and Bartłomiej Gawel showcases his work on *The Witcher* games. Traditional artist Sam Ectoplasm discusses her raw, visceral illustrations, and Sean Andrew Murray shares sketches from his extensive fantasy world.

Also in this issue, Eduardo Rodriguez and Maciej Sidorowicz show how to plein air paint changing environments, and Klaus Pillon demonstrates how to speed paint impressive water effects. James Wolf Strehle teaches the fundamental elements of perfecting perspective in fantasy art, Jan Weißbecher shows us how he creates his dark futuristic illustrations, and much more!

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# Contributors



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Bartłomiej Gawel is an artist and illustrator who has worked for CD PROJEKT RED for the past nine years, currently as Principal Concept Artist. He has worked on every installment of *The Witcher*.



### ASHLEY MACKENZIE

Ashley Mackenzie is a freelance artist and illustrator based in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. She earned a degree in Illustration from OCADU in Toronto, Canada, and her work has been featured in several famous publications.



### SAM ECTOPLASM

Sam Ectoplasm was born in 1986 in Marseille, France; she moved to Montréal, Canada in 2009. Sam is a self-taught illustrator who creates surreal and sensual introspective art.



### SEAN ANDREW MURRAY

Sean Andrew Murray is a freelance concept artist and illustrator working in games, film and television. Sean is the creator of *The Great City of Gateway*, a fantasy world, with the game *Gateway: Uprising* releasing this summer.



### KLAUS PILLON

Freelance concept artist Klaus Pillon graduated in 3D production before focusing on his primary love: 2D. Largely self-taught, he has worked professionally since 2013 for games and movies.



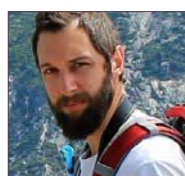
### EDUARDO RODRIGUEZ

Eduardo Rodriguez is a 2D artist who enjoys concept art and illustrations. He is currently a freelance artist in Los Angeles, and works in the mobile game department at Disney Interactive.



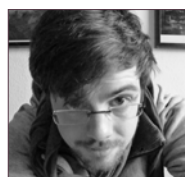
### MACIEJ SIDOROWICZ

Maciej Sidorowicz is freelance digital painter based in Warsaw, Poland. He creates illustrations mainly for the advertising and animation markets.



### JAMES WOLF STREHLE

James is a concept artist and illustrator in the games industry. He works for Volta where he is afforded the opportunity to create art for some of the biggest games in the industry.



### JAN WEISSBECHER

Jan Weißbecher is a full-time freelance concept artist and illustrator based in Germany. He mostly works in the games industry, but he is also trying to broaden into other fields including sci-fi and fantasy illustration.



### ALEX FIGINI

Alex Figini is a concept artist for the entertainment industry based in Edmonton, Canada. He is currently Senior Concept Artist at Bioware and is an instructor at Learn Squared.



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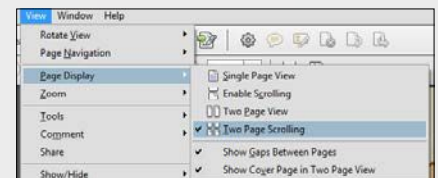
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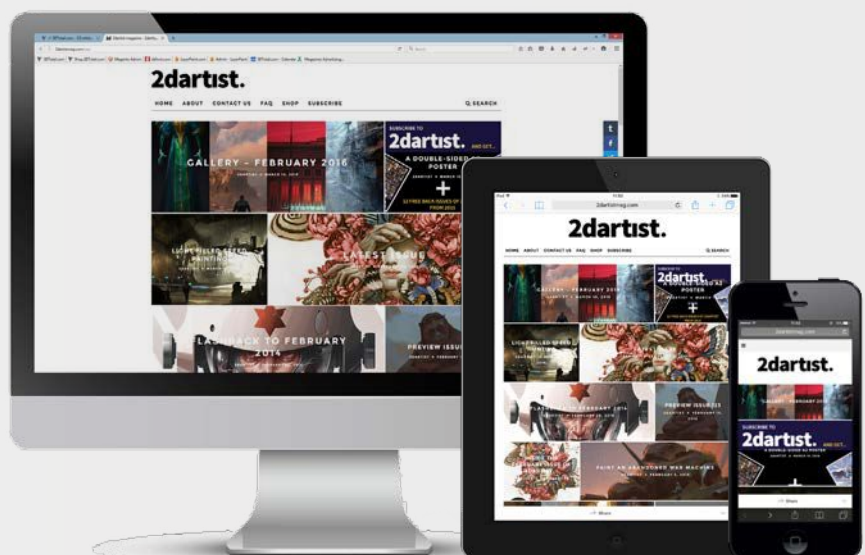
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# Contents Issue 134

- ////////////////////
- 006\_** Dramatic game concepts  
Explore the powerful concept art behind *The Witcher* games
- 020\_** Emotive editorial designs  
Ashley Mackenzie shares some insight in to the world of editorial illustrations
- 034\_** Surreal and visceral illustrations  
Discover the intertwined and complex art of Sam Ectoplasm
- 050\_** Sketching new worlds  
Sean Andrew Murray talks about how he uses his sketchbook as a tool for discovery
- 062\_** Gallery  
Ten new inspiring artworks including work by Ömer Tunç and Tony Zhou Shuo
- 078\_** Speed paint magic effects: water  
Klaus Pillon takes you through the process of creating a magic fantasy speed painting
- 086\_** Capture a changing seascape  
Learn how to adapt your digital painting skills for a moving environment
- 098\_** Plein air paint a ruin  
Use Procreate and an iPad to create plein air paintings of ruined and decaying buildings
- 106\_** Fantasy fundamentals: perspective  
James Wolf Strehle demonstrates the fundamentals of perspective in fantasy art
- 118\_** Creating a dark futuristic painting  
Jan Weißbecher takes you through his process for creating *Celsius 13-Crone*
- 128\_** Digital painting using photographs  
See how stock photos can quickly enhance your digital paintings

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06



118



78





## The Artist



**Bartłomiej Gawel**  
gawel.artstation.com

**Interviewed by:**  
Annie Moss

Bartłomiej Gawel is an artist, and illustrator who has worked for CD PROJEKT RED for the past nine years, currently as Principal Concept Artist. He has worked on every installment of *The Witcher*.



# Dramatic game concepts

Bartłomiej Gawel, Principal Concept Artist at CD PROJEKT RED, discusses the importance of storytelling in art, and showcases his work on *The Witcher* games ▶







Drawing has been a life-long passion for Bartłomiej Gawel, who began drawing when he was only four years old, motivated by his father's love of Baroque style oil painting. The child-like approach is something he has tried to maintain over the years by attempting to find meaning in artwork without judging them. Instead Bartłomiej looks for meaning in the story behind an artwork, attempting to uncover the essence of what the artist is saying in each piece.

Having worked for CD PROJEKT RED on *The Witcher* projects for the past nine years, Bartłomiej has a wealth of experience creating exciting concepts which incorporate complex narratives and multiple characters. This month Bartłomiej shows us his recent works and talks to us about the importance of being kind to yourself, how breaking projects down to small steps helps him stay focused, and why he thinks it's important to work with pencils.

**2dartist:** Hi Bartłomiej, thank you for talking to *2dartist*! Can you kick things off by telling us a little bit about yourself and your work?

**Bartłomiej Gawel:** Hi, thank you for having me. Well, I'm thirty-eight-years old and I live in Poland, Warsaw. I'm very happy to have a great family (a fiancé and a two-year-old son) who keep me busy all the time! Also I have a great job which happens to be my passion. So, I'm lucky.

For my work I just do what I have been doing my whole life. I started drawing when I was four or five years old and since then I haven't stopped. So I was lucky enough not to have to think about what I wanted to do in my life. The path was clear for me: I wanted to create art. What I didn't expect was to be working in the videogames industry. That was a surprise.

**2da:** Storytelling is really important in your work, how do you ensure there is a clear sense of narrative in your work?

**BG:** The storytelling is the most important part of an artwork for me. As a viewer I always try to find the meaning of a piece. It is like having the open mind of a child. The goal is to see without judging or making predictions. What is really going on in this artwork? What does the artist want to say? I love it. That is the reason why I love contemporary art so much. You can find so many meanings in a piece of art. It can surprise you. ►

- Concept art for UMA (short for Ugliest Man Alive), a character cursed in *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*. He is first encountered by Geralt as a pet to the Bloody Baron, but Geralt and Yennefer later attempt to remove the curse  
Art direction: Adam Badowski ©CD PROJEKT S. A.





● Foglets, shown on a card made for *Gwent: The Witcher Card Game*  
Art direction: Katarzyna Redesiuk ©CD PROJEKT S. A.





## If you could write a letter to your younger self, just starting out as an artist, what advice would you give?

Be yourself. Don't worry about what others say. Be brave, read more books and have a lot of fun.

## What do you think has been most influential to your career success?

I think my father and his paintings. He was my first very powerful inspiration. Working for CD PROJEKT RED has also been a great place to grow.

Having said that; in my works I always try to stay focused on a subject, the main idea, and theme. I always ask myself some questions: what is really important here? What is the key idea? From this point I try to find some answers for my questions by using a visual language. What is the best light for this theme? Which composition works the best? What colors will I use? And so on. You could say that everything from form and composition, to light and color is subservient to storytelling.

**2da:** What made you want to pursue a career as an artist?

**BG:** When I was very young I used to see my father copying old Baroque paintings with oils. I still

remember the smell of the paint. I was fascinated by my father and his process of painting; very quiet, almost like a meditation. The pictures that he painted were very small and full of detail. There was a lot of mystery in them. Soon I realized that if I drew I would have his attention, his and my mothers. So I drew. And after a while I started to enjoy it.

**2da:** What are your preferred tools to work with and why?

**BG:** I have always preferred pencils, maybe because it was the very first tool I used. I love oils, for obvious reasons, but unfortunately I haven't used them for a while. And I love to work in Photoshop, because it is so easy. This ease can be dangerous though, because

after a long period of time only using Photoshop your brain can become very lazy and you will have a lot of trouble just to draw. That's why I'll never give up pencils but my real dream is to get back to oils.

**2da:** Which tools, techniques or software would you like to explore in the future, and why?

**BG:** Oh, definitely some 3D software. I wish I could do it sooner because it can easily add new quality to your work. I have some experience in ZBrush and I really love it. It's so easy to use. It took me two weeks to learn it and then I was able to do the character heads for *The Witcher 2*. But since then I haven't used it as much as I wish. I'd also like to learn some rendering software like KeyShot which could speed up my work, especially now, when I'm working on illustrations on *Gwent: The Witcher Card Game*.

**2da:** Which artist or group of artists particularly inspires your work?

**BG:** There are a lot of names on the list. I love Russian painters from the beginning of the nineteenth century like Ilya Repin. I also like American illustrators and artist like the Wyeth family, and Polish artists like Jacek Malczewski or Aleksander Gierymski, Olga Boznańska, and Józef Chełmoński.

- Concept art of a siren for *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*. Sirens and lamias (the sirens' more dangerous cousins) usually hunt in flocks, making use of their numbers as well as their ability to move effortlessly through water and air. Art direction: Adam Badowski ©CD PROJEKT S. A.



**2da:** If you could meet any artist (past or present) what would you ask them and why?

**BG:** Probably some questions about life and art, because I want to learn from the mistakes of others rather than make my own. That is why I like biography books. I think I would meet Andrew Wyeth and ask him about his technique of watercolors, which was incredible.

**2da:** Where (and when) do you feel you are at your most creative?

**BG:** Definitely when I travel alone, when I go to new places and meet new people. I can focus more on myself and my feelings. That is the most inspiring time for me. Ideas just flow into my head. I guess I need to travel more often.

**2da:** Artist block is a problem for many creative people. Can you share a couple of tips you use when the inspiration stops flowing?

**BG:** It just happens. I think it is much easier when you work with other people. You can always talk to someone, share the frustration and get some feedback. I don't know how it is when you work alone, as I've always worked with others. ►



THE  
WITCHER  
WILD HUNT















- One of the promotional images for *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*  
Art direction: Adam Badowski, Base render: Paweł Brudniak ©CD PROJEKT S. A.



I guess that a simple walk can sometimes help. Also changing a task and going back to it after a while could be useful. But I think the most important thing is to be forgiving and kind to yourself. It is like the weather; there are moments of storm but after, there is sun which you can enjoy, or at least it will stop raining.

**“I visualize pictures instead. It is like having a camera in your head which records a picture”**

**2da:** What has been the project you have most enjoyed working on?

**BG:** I'm working on it now: the illustration for *Gwent: The Witcher Card Game*. It is the first time in my career when I have had so much freedom and fun.

I do each illustration in a different way and learn from the process. The most important thing is that I have the privilege of working with amazing talents from whom I learn a lot.

**2da:** What initial steps do you take when you are first given a brief for a new project?

**BG:** First I read it carefully and I start to think about it. I think in pictures, which means that I don't have any particular thoughts, I visualize pictures instead. It is like having a camera in your head which records a picture and when you don't like the angle of a shot, you can change it to a different spot. Also, I look at a lot of pictures, paintings, movies and so on.

After a while ideas start to come and I try to catch them in a simple drawing. When I have a core idea I try to figure out the composition, light and so on, in a simple drawing, to create a distilled idea. When it is accepted, I can start to finish it.

**2da:** How do you keep yourself motivated when working on a difficult project?

**BG:** I do small steps at a time. When I have a huge mountain to climb, I usually don't think about my motivation, I just think: I'm doing this, because climbing a huge mountain is a great project. It is easier if you just focus on each step.

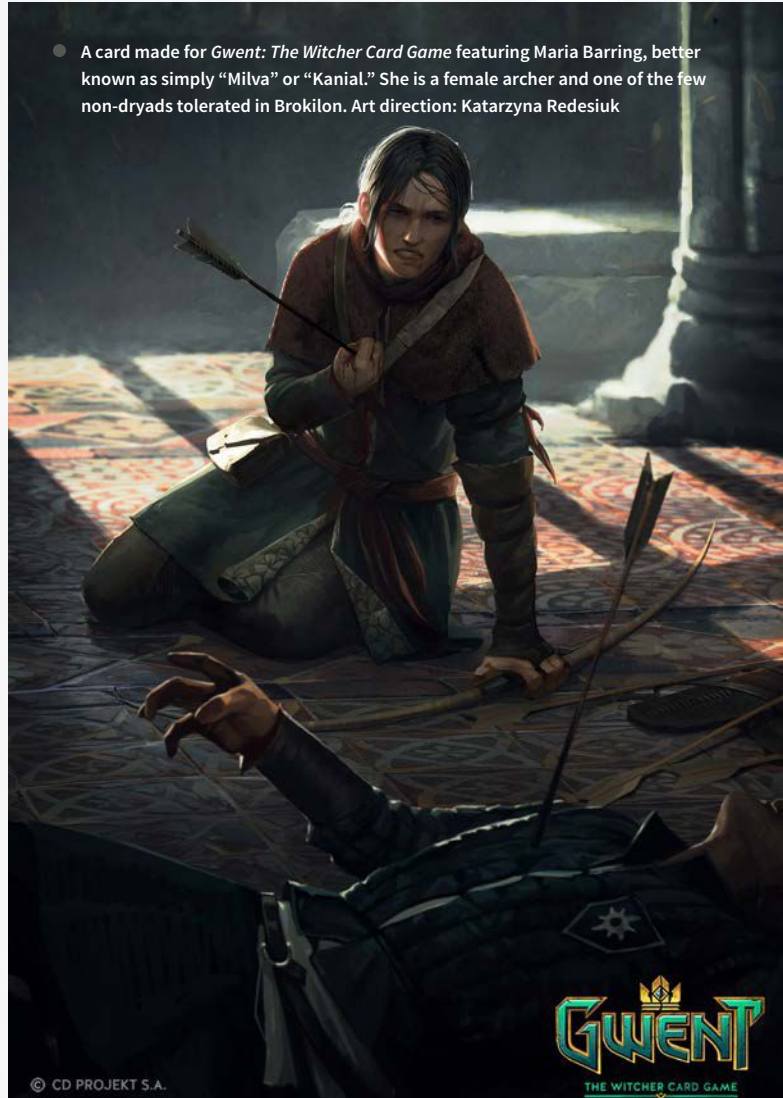
I remember working on the cover art of *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, which was a mountain for me. I worked on this for half a year and I did (with help of some outsourcing) more than six hundred propositions. ►



- A card made for *Gwent: The Witcher Card Game* featuring a lubberkin  
Art direction: Katarzyna Redesiuk



- A card made for *Gwent: The Witcher Card Game* featuring Maria Barrig, better known as simply “Milva” or “Kania.” She is a female archer and one of the few non-dryads tolerated in Brokilon. Art direction: Katarzyna Redesiuk



- “Chorts are smaller than fiends, true. But still big enough to kill.” A card made for *Gwent: The Witcher Card Game*. Art direction: Katarzyna Redesiuk



- Vesemir of Kaer Morhen is the oldest and most experienced witcher at Kaer Morhen  
Art direction: Katarzyna Redesiuk









Only focusing on each proposition and idea for a cover prevented me from quitting my job.

**2da:** When you're not working hard on your art, what do you like to do with your time?

**BG:** I really don't have too much spare time. I do most of my art at work, so at home I try to do my own art. I play a lot with my son and I also read some psychology books.

**2da:** Finally, where will we be able to see your work next? Are there any projects we should look out for?

**BG:** Now I'm working on *Gwent: The Witcher Card Game*, there you can find plenty of my works and the beautiful art of other artists. The game itself is amazing. ●

*Thank you Bartłomiej for talking to 2dartist!*

## Is there anything you think budding artists should try to avoid?

I think everyone has his or her unique path to go on but I can tell you what I'm trying to avoid. I try not to be influenced by other artist's works, especially from popular sites like ArtStation. I choose my inspirations very carefully.







## The Artist



**Ashley Mackenzie**  
ashmackenzie.com

**Interviewed by:**  
Annie Moss

Ashley Mackenzie is a freelance artist and illustrator based in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. She earned a degree in Illustration from OCADU in Toronto, Canada, and her work has been featured in several famous publications.

# Emotive editorial illustrations

We talk to freelance illustrator Ashley Mackenzie about her creative process and working her way through creative blocks ▶











Ashley Mackenzie is a Canadian artist and illustrator who specializes in editorial illustrations. She also enjoys creating concept art and decorative illustrations. She has won awards and recognition for her work, including a Gold medal for illustration from OCADU, Canada. Ashley uses her imagination and visual vocabulary to create illustrations that solve problems, or find simple visual solutions to complex themes and ideas. Her work has been published in several famous publications including *Scientific American* and the *New York Times Magazine*. When not drawing she can be found reading, playing videogames or thinking about her next project.

**2dartist:** Hi Ashley, thank you for talking to 2dartist! Can you kick things off by telling us a little bit about yourself and your work?

**Ashley Mackenzie:** I'm a freelance illustrator who tends to mostly create editorial work with a focus on finding simple conceptual visual solutions to complex ideas.

**2da:** Your work is often highly emotive and allegorical; can you tell us a bit about the ideas behind your work?

**AM:** It really varies from piece to piece, however, I always try my best to approach an article searching for visual and conceptual clues that I can then tie together into an illustration. I think the best illustrations are not only able to stand on their own but are further enhanced by an understanding of the article, so that is something I strive for in my work.

**“There are always new problems to solve and I’m always learning and growing”**

**2da:** What made you want to pursue a career as an illustrator?

**AM:** I have always loved image-making, whether it was drawing or painting, and I loved how open the illustration industry is from editorial and publishing, to concept art and product design, and so on. There are always new problems to solve and I’m always learning and growing.

**2da:** What are your preferred tools to work with and why? ►

## Ashley’s significant artwork

I’ve always dealt with a lot of self-doubt and ongoing worries about whether or not I’d be able to make it as an illustrator. This piece was for the *New York Times* book review and it was one of my first few published illustrations. Being able to complete a piece that I was proud of in a 3-day timeframe for a client I could barely imagine working for as a student really finally legitimized the idea that I would actually be able to make a living from illustration. I quit my part-time job a few months later and despite some ups and downs I still feel incredibly happy and grateful to be doing illustration full-time.





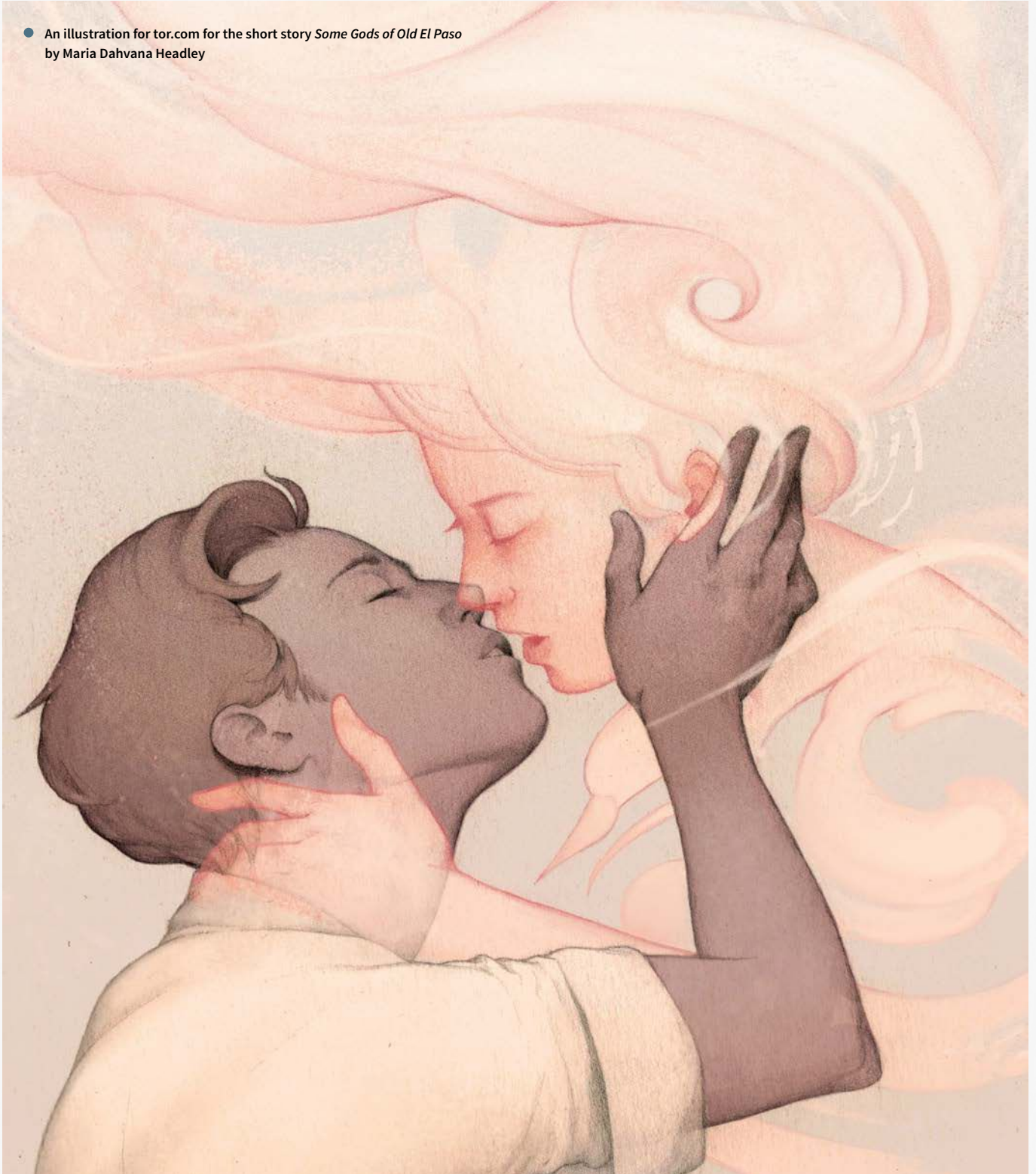
## If you could write a letter to your younger self, just starting out as an artist, what advice would you give?

I would probably say: "Don't be so hard on yourself, you're doing fine. It's okay to take a break now and then."

## Is there anything you think budding artists should try to avoid?

I'd say try not to avoid anything! Experiment as much as you can, find what interests you, what ideas you find engaging, and what forms catch your fancy and just explore. It's a good way to start finding your voice while keeping an open mind to any new paths or possibilities.

- An illustration for [tor.com](#) for the short story *Some Gods of Old El Paso* by Maria Dahvana Headley





- One of my thesis illustrations about how the ease of finding information with technology inhibits our ability to retain details and be truly knowledgeable





**AM:** Most of my early work was a hybrid of digital and traditional techniques, with the initial drawing done in graphite and the color applied in Photoshop. Lately I've been striving to find a purely digital workflow without sacrificing the elements of working traditionally. These elements really appeal to me because they are much more appropriate for the extremely short timelines offered for most editorial work.

**2da:** Are there any tools, techniques, or software you would like to explore in the future, and why?

**AM:** Mostly I am just trying to become more proficient with digital techniques because in many ways they're still foreign to me and often quite different from traditional methods.

**2da:** Which artist or group of artists particularly inspires your work?

**AM:** Oh there are so many; James Jean, Sam Weber, Dadu Shin, Jillian Tamaki, Sam Wolfe Connelly, Sachin Teng, Shaun Tan, Joao Ruas, Nimit Malavia, Victo Ngai, Dave McKean, Tomer Hanuka, Ivan Solyaev, Andrew Hem, Teagan White, Samantha Mash, Kevin Hong, Joy Ang, Kelly Smith, Miranda Meeks, Tran Nguyen, Lynn Scurfield, Rachel Suggs, Corinne Reid, Zach Montoya, Nicolas Delort, Richie Pope, Natalie Hall, Rovina Cai, and so many more but I'm running out of space now!

**“For the most part I actually get my best ideas when I’m out of the house”**

**2da:** Where (and when) do you feel you are at your most creative?

**AM:** For the most part I actually get my best ideas when I'm out of the house, and if I'm working from my home studio I'm usually most productive during mid-afternoon and late at night. Obviously work doesn't always cater to those times, so I try to stay flexible as that's what I've found works best over the years.

**2da:** Artist block is a problem for many creative people. Can you share a couple of tips you use when the inspiration stops flowing?

**AM:** Usually when I'm really stuck I do something completely unrelated, whether that's walking,

● An illustration for the *Walrus* about the gender divide in classical conducting





working on a different project, or just going back to basic fundamental studies (figure drawing, still life, master studies and so on). It serves as a good palette cleanser and also improves your technical skills.

**2da:** What has been the project you have most enjoyed working on?

**AM:** It would be a tie between doing Tor covers and illustrations for science editorials. Tor always offers really engaging stories and a lot of creative freedom where as the science editorials always offer really interesting and unique ways to put ideas together.

**2da:** What initial steps do you take when you are first given a brief for a new project? Do you dive straight in or do you have a more analytical process? ►

## 🕒 Artist Timeline Ashley's career so far

**2013:** Finished thesis at OCADU, Canada, Gold Medalist for the Illustration program

**2013:** First published editorial piece in *Canadian Lawyer* magazine

**2013:** New York Times book review

**2013:** First piece for *Scientific American*

**2014:** Quit part-time barista job to pursue illustration full-time

**2014:** First piece for tor.com

**2014:** Had two of my Tor pieces accepted into the SOI book annual

**2014:** Illustrated the poster for OCADU's 99th annual graduate exhibition

**2015:** Released first limited edition print run through Black Dragon Press

**2015:** Full page illustration in *New York Times Magazine*





## What do you think has been most influential to your career success?

Social media has been incredibly useful for my career, it's allowed me to reach so many people and also engage with many art directors. The support I received from my professors and other working illustrators has also been invaluable!









**AM:** I definitely have an analytical approach, maybe even too analytical! I read through the brief or the article a couple times and take notes on any key phrases or ideas that I think could be used to make something out of, then I make a list from visual cues that I think would work well with the piece, and finally I start sketching things out to see what actually reads well as an image. Sometimes it takes thinking and drawing through some pretty downright awful ideas to stumble across a concept that's genuinely interesting.

**2da:** How do you keep yourself motivated when working on a difficult project?

**AM:** I try to break the project down into smaller goals that are easier to finish, and I find that helps keep a good momentum going. If I'm really stuck I will stop

and do some studies or if I have time go for a walk to clear my head and come back to it with fresh eyes.

**2da:** When you're not working hard on your art, what do you like to do with your time?

**AM:** Definitely still need to work on finding that work/life balance but the odd times when I'm not working I enjoy reading, watching movies, and playing videogames.

**2da:** Finally, where will we be able to see your work next? Are there any projects we should look out for?

**AM:** Right now I have a couple of poster illustrations in the works as well as some editorial work, plus a long term illustration project that I'm hoping to wrap up over the next few months. ●



● One of my thesis illustrations about how we may never be able to fully comprehend the complexities of the universe, but knowing our limitations shouldn't hinder our attempts to do so









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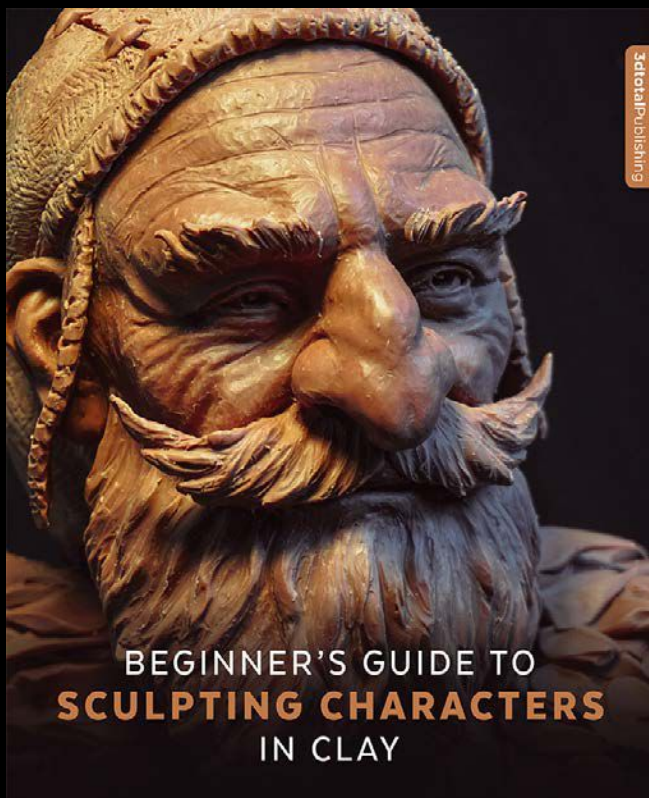
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**Sam Ectoplasm**  
samectoplasm.gallery

Sam Ectoplasm was born in 1986 in Marseille, France; she moved to Montréal, Canada in 2009. Sam is a self-taught illustrator who creates surreal and sensual introspective art.

A R T I S T   S P O T L I G H T

# Surreal and visceral illustrations

This month we speak to self-taught artist Sam Ectoplasm about her beautifully visceral imagery that explores what it means to be human ▶

N U D I T Y  
W A R N I N G



**For Sam Ectoplasm art is not only a way to understand what it means to be human, but is also a way to delve into the subconscious and discover the hidden self. She incorporates different organic forms into her art, which include sinuous viscera and twisting hair. This results in surreal and beautiful drawings that give you a sneak peek into her inner-self.**

Sam is currently studying for an Art History and Museology degree at Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada, and spends much of her free time visiting exhibitions and writing essays. She also enjoys visiting libraries looking for inspiration in old anatomical and vegetal drawings. Sam talks to us about her creative process, the motivation her close friends and family have inspired in her, and the importance of enjoying your artistic journey...

**2dartist:** Hello Sam! Thanks for talking to 2dartist. First off, could you introduce yourself with a bit about your background and projects?

**Sam Ectoplasm:** Hello! I've been drawing for as long as I can remember. I studied visual arts in Aix en Provence, which allowed me to experiment with various media, but I developed my practice of mixed media drawing by myself. After moving to Canada in 2009, I started drawing more consistently and developed my current style using pen, ink, pencils, and watercolor on paper. I have been part of exhibitions in Canada, the USA, Japan, and Ireland. I have had a few private commissioned works or themed exhibitions, but I mostly work on personal themes. For me drawing is a way to understand my subconscious and it helps me to heal.

**2da:** What, or who, encouraged you to take up a career as an artist?

**SE:** I have always known I wanted to make art; it has always been a sanctuary of soothing solitude and an essential activity for me. However, it has taken me some time to develop this desire because I was lacking confidence. I didn't find university very useful because, in my opinion, it tries to make art students fit in the mold of contemporary art – where vaguely intellectual concepts and poor aesthetics are king. I found meeting other artists dedicated to their work such as my boyfriend and close friends to be more inspirational, and this has given me the motivation to take up art as a professional.

Luckily, my family has been very supportive of my choice to become a professional artist, it helps that my mother is also an artist!

**2da:** You have said that your work celebrates the complexity of the human psyche and body, can you tell us more about these ideas?

**“As I am an anxious person about both my mental and physical health, I feel I need to create images that not only represent this fear of death and decay, but also the beauty and strength of life”**

**SE:** In my artwork I study the principle of the living, in the body, as well in all forms of life on earth. Each element can work alone or together; the microcosm mirrors the macrocosm and

some patterns repeat themselves. Everything in reality is really intertwined and complex. The mechanisms of life include expansion, decay, and death, which can be overwhelming for a lot of us and is often left unaddressed in modern society.

As I am an anxious person about both my mental and physical health, I feel I need to create images that not only represent this fear of death and decay, but also the beauty and strength of life.

Organic forms, inspired by nerves, organs, hair, and muscles, have become embodiments of psychic and emotional states that are all woven together. Making this look sweet and beautiful is a pretty secular idea; indeed, in the Middle Ages each organ was linked to an emotion and a type of temperament and health. For me the essence of art is trying to understand what it is to be human. ►



● Petit dessin marie – pen and ink on paper – 5 × 7” (2016)





● *Overflow* – pen, ink, and pencils on paper – 16 × 20" (2014)











**2da:** Your work often depicts surreal, visceral figures with a touch of Art Nouveau styling. How have you developed and adapted your style?

**SE:** My style came gradually and naturally, it developed through experimentation and practice. I first began using just a pen but then started to add watercolors and then pencils. At first, the watercolor and pencils were used more to color the bodies, but I'm now detaching from this practice.

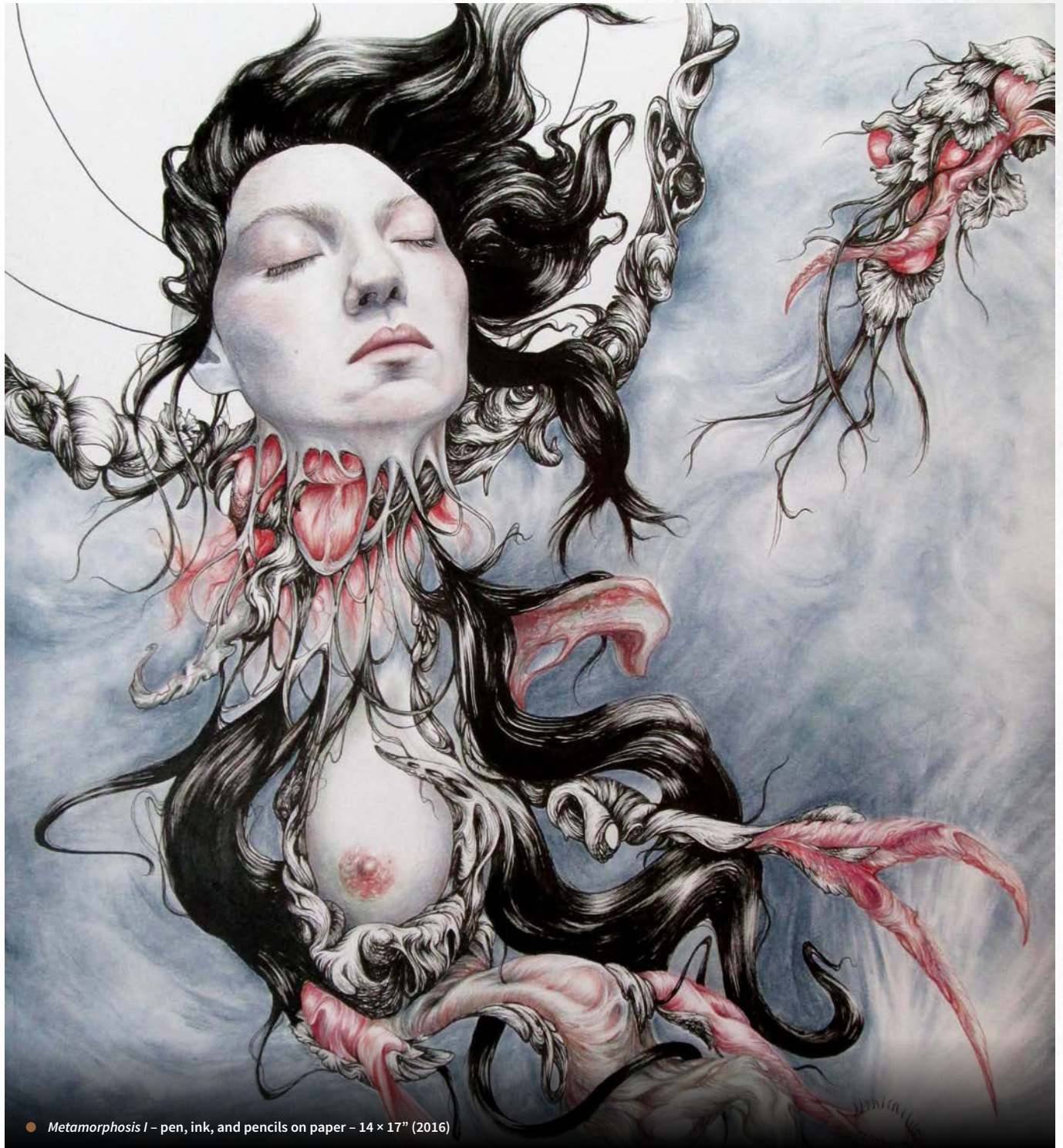
Art Nouveau is an appealing style to emulate; I like the movement, fluidity, and excessive ornamentation. I like doing both academical drawings of portraits and nudes, which are both challenging and rational, mixed with the freedom and randomness of the organic motives that I draw freehand in a meditative state.

Each emotion is visually expressed by the waves of different textures and elements, made possible by using various mediums.

**2da:** Where do you turn to for inspiration? Are there any artists you like to reference?

**SE:** I mainly get my inspiration from internal paradoxes and spiritual questions; I believe that drawing has its own life force and it reveals to me something from my own subconscious that was previously hidden.

I draw inspiration for textures and colors from vegetal and anatomical photos and old drawings.



● *Metamorphosis I* – pen, ink, and pencils on paper – 14 × 17" (2016)



My tastes for artists is always changing and encompasses a wide variety of styles, so it's difficult to list them all here, but to try to name a few I do like the following: Hans Bellmer, Takato Yamamoto, Allison Sommers, Gustave Adolf Mossa, Jason Shaw Alexander, Lux Xzymhr, and Jean Delville.

**2da:** What advice can you give to our readers who want to develop their drawing techniques in a similar manner?

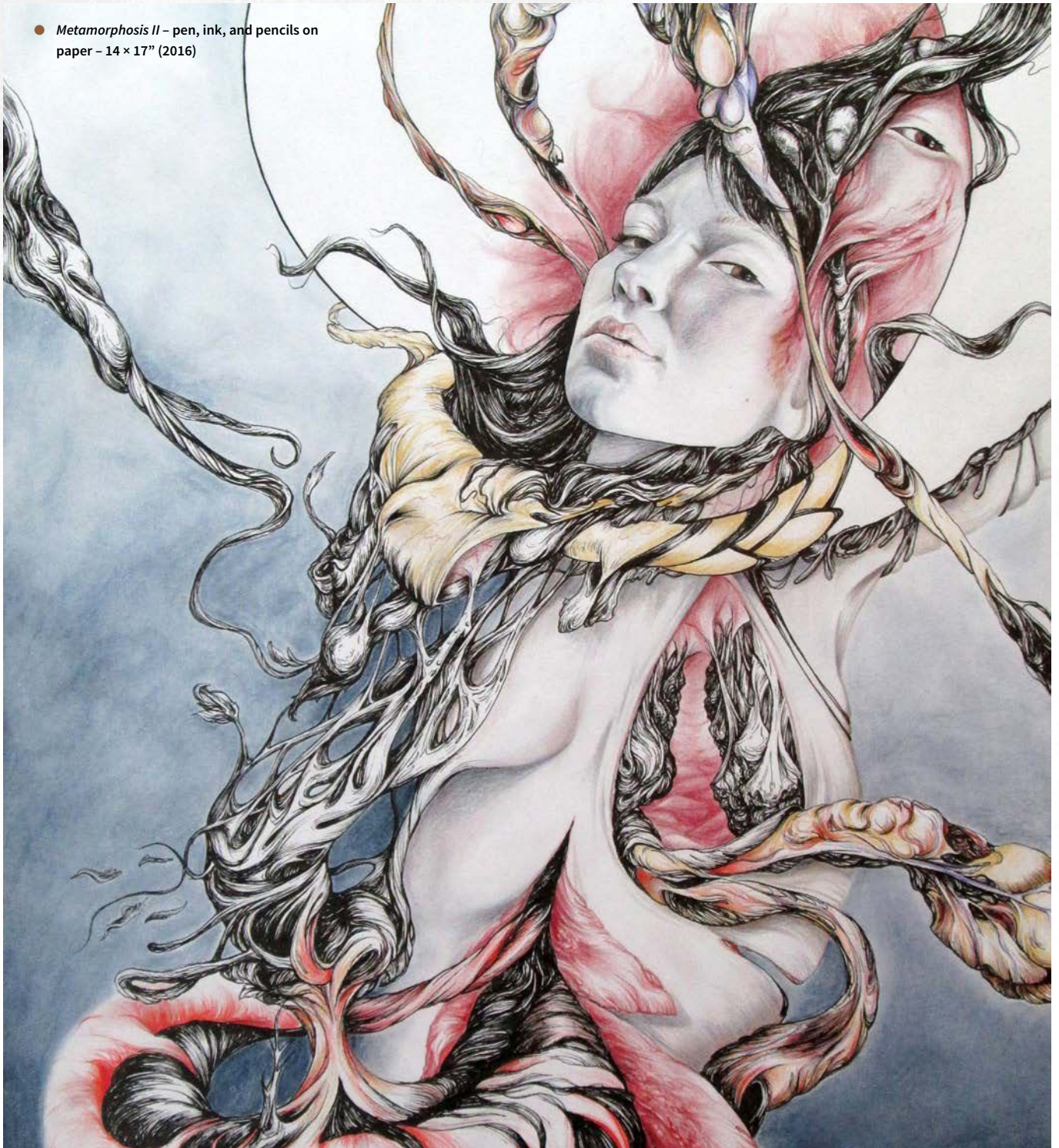
**“Mastering observational drawing trains the eye and will make you feel more at ease with your tools. Once you have mastered it you can always detach from it and explore something different”**

**SE:** I developed this way of working because it fits in with the feelings I want to convey to my drawings. Style isn't a goal in itself; it

should go hand in hand with the personal subject matter and sensitivity of the artist. Every artist develops his or her practice by watching what others do, but they have to find their own personal expression eventually.

I would encourage artists to think about their subject, what matters to them, and what's particular about their vision. Mastering observational drawing trains the eye and will make you feel more at ease with your tools. ►

● *Metamorphosis II* – pen, ink, and pencils on paper – 14 × 17” (2016)









● *Fantôme dans un Verre* – pen, ink, and pencils  
on paper – 14 × 17" (2016)



Once you have mastered it you can always detach from it and explore something different. I would encourage artists to experiment gradually, like I did, with different mediums and see which one feels the most exciting and meaningful for what the artist wants to say. Also, they should be observing other works of art, making sketches and studies, documenting ideas, textures and collecting them in a file to go to for inspiration, and have fun above all.

**2da:** What are your preferred tools to work with and why?

**SE:** I prefer working with sharp tools such as micro point pens and pencils that allows precision and sharpness. I like the fact that it takes a long time to achieve a figure, but going line by line is a devotional ritual that makes you learn patience. I also love the smooth and sensual feeling of the colored pencils, for blending and shading.

I like to balance these with a more spontaneous medium that can create random forms and

allows me to see hidden images, like in clouds of watercolor. Black India ink is also a long time favorite for making sharper and bigger areas of darkness. Mostly, I choose tools according to how they can create harmony or contrasts in the various areas of the drawing.

**2da:** Do you have a particular place you like to go to draw? Do you create your works in a studio, at home or out in nature?

**SE:** I work in my apartment which is basically a cube with few windows. I draw in a small corner of the flat I share with my partner, who is a painter. I am lucky to have a big table to work on that was given to me by my father's partner who was a graphic artist. There's not a lot of space so everything has to be organized and tidy.

**2da:** What has been your favorite project to work on so far?

**SE:** *Désincarnations* is a series I created in 2014 and is probably my favorite body of work because this was when my practice began to evolve; I ►











was taking risks by trying new techniques. It was evolving before my eyes, which was a very thrilling sensation. It's more difficult when I participate in a themed exhibition, with a deadline. There are always drawings that I find more accomplished than others, but I have the freedom to do what I want and that's precious to me.

**"I think it's only with time, practice, dedication, and perseverance that artists gain confidence in what they do"**

**2da:** How do you deal with a challenging project? Do you have any tips for our readers?

**SE:** Sometimes when starting a project the most challenging thing to do is to kick yourself in the butt and face the "blank page." I am regularly, like a lot of artists, confronted with the fear of failure and lack of confidence. Steven Pressfield addressed it well in "The war of art" (I would recommend reading this for aspiring artists that are having trouble getting to it). I think it's only with time, practice, dedication, and perseverance that artists gain confidence in what they do. Avoiding putting too much pressure on oneself is essential; art is an occupation that is supposed to make you discover yourself, and about enjoying the moment, not winning a race.

**2da:** Are there any other skills and techniques you would like to learn in the future? Are there any materials you would like to experiment with?

**SE:** There are so many things that I would like to learn! In my drawing practice I still want to try out new possibilities and new techniques, such as engravings. I would also like to work more with textile and learn embroidery.

**2da:** What has your experience as a freelance artist been like? What lessons have you learned?

**SE:** I am still learning a lot! It is hard to multitask, answer emails, set up an online shop, create galleries submissions, and so on, all at once because I want to have time to create artwork. I have learned that the way you present yourself and value your work is important too.

Being proactive is also a huge part of it but also not overwhelming yourself is important too. I tend to want to be seen all over social media and participate in every exhibition ►







● *Le Chant du Cygne* – pen, ink, and pencils on paper mounted on wood board – 16 × 20” (2016)



● *Armistice* – pen, ink and pencils on paper – 22 × 30” (2014)

## ⚡ SAM'S SIGNIFICANT ARTWORK

This triptych is from 2013 and reflects an intense period of work and experimentation, where I was looking for my voice. I was a bit uncomfortable with using colors so I did all the outlines and shadings with black pen first before adding the colors with watercolors; I was very nervous of the result! It's a very detailed drawing that took me a month to complete.

It was the first time I used visceral and vegetal imagery so accurately, opening bodies, because of the theme of love and co-creating bonds. I felt I needed to depict my feelings and thoughts in a dramatic way, to be honest and raw about it. I drew from photographs of my partner and me; drawing us was a way to document, commit to, and sublimate our relationship. There's a naive and authentic feel to this drawing, even though I would do some elements differently today.







but, lately, I have found that slowing down the pace and concentrating on a few, consistent projects is better for me.

**2da:** What does a working day in the life of Sam look like?

**SE:** It's always changing, according to what's the priority and I hope to find a routine that sticks. Usually, it's trying to work on drawing for a big chunk of hours, without distraction. I find the more you do, the more you want to, so it helps to start in the morning. After that, a break is needed so I go out for a walk and combine it with errands like going to the post office to ship artworks. A lot of the time is also updating my etsy shop, website, or social media, as well as sometimes preparing an exhibition proposal. Also, I need a lot of daydreaming, writing down ideas and concepts and resting, I feel it's a huge but unnoticed part of making art.

**2da:** How do you like to spend your time when you aren't creating beautiful art?

**SE:** I am currently finishing my Art History and Museology degree at Université du Québec à Montréal, so I am spending a lot of my time reading, visiting exhibitions, and writing art essays. I love spending time in libraries looking for inspiration and learning more on a particular topic. I like sewing and embellishing clothing, cooking, walking in the parks of Montreal, and meeting friends; I find pleasure in the simplest things.

**2da:** And finally, what can we look forward to from you next?

**SE:** I want to follow my path quietly, and keep on creating art that is meaningful to my life and to the people who are connected to it. I'm currently working on a new series which will allow me to refine my style and what I have to say. I'm reflecting on how I can take the medium of drawing further. It would be great to show my work in a solo exhibition, so I will have to try to find the right gallery for it. ●

*Thank you Sam for taking the time to speak to 2dartist today!*







## The Artist



**Sean Andrew Murray**  
seanandrewmurray.com

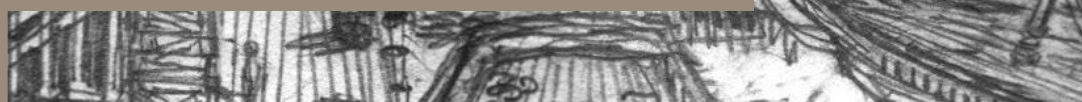
Sean Andrew Murray is a freelance concept artist and illustrator working in games, film and television. Sean is the creator of *The Great City of Gateway*, a fantasy world, with the game *Gateway: Uprising* releasing this summer.



# Sketchbook of Sean Andrew Murray: Sketching new worlds

Learn how Sean Andrew Murray's sketchbook became an invaluable tool in creating his fantasy world *The Great City of Gateway* ▶

All sketches © 2017 Sean Andrew Murray









## Step inside Sean's extensive fantasy world through the sketches that conceived it...

My father tells me that my very first drawing was on the underside of our living room table, which I had crawled under with some crayons at the age of two. Since then, I have always had paper and pencils with me wherever I go. When I was young, you could usually find me in my room drawing my own comic strip characters, or my own version of *Transformers*. I fell in love with fantasy after reading a copy of *Lord of the Rings* that my stepmother let me borrow. This inevitably led me to playing *Dungeons & Dragons* with a small group of close friends, all of whom loved to draw as well. We would create elaborate campaigns complete with our own hand-drawn maps and monster manuals.

In high school in the early 90s I started experimenting with digital art and keeping a sketchbook – something I credit my high school art teacher, Mrs. Hammonds, with encouraging us to do. This is a habit that has stuck with me ever since. In college I studied illustration, but it was also when I began to find my own unique voice in my sketchbooks. They were a place where I could experiment free from judgment or scrutiny. To this day I always keep a sketchbook with me wherever I go, and it has become an invaluable tool for the development of my own personal IP: *The Great City of Gateway*.

My sketches have also helped me throughout my career. Most recently, at San Diego Comic-Con in 2014, film director and producer Guillermo del Toro bought the printed version of my sketchbook at my booth, and soon afterwards hired me to work on a TV show he was producing, and also to illustrate his Young Adult novel *Trollhunters*.

Lately, I have been working to build and expand my personal IP, *Gateway*, which is a fantasy world based around a huge city bustling with wizards, magic and intrigue. To this end, I recently launched a Patreon campaign to give my fans and followers an opportunity to follow along as I develop *Gateway*, and even have a chance to help me decide which corner of *Gateway* to explore in drawings and paintings next!

**“My largest source of inspiration has been the world around me. Opening my eyes to the idiosyncrasies of human life, and the things we build”**

### Inspiration and ideas:

I find inspiration all around me, in daily life, in the cities and towns that I travel to, in books

that I collect, and in the movies I watch. As a kid, if I wasn't drawing, you could usually find me with my nose buried in a fantasy novel or a comic book. I remember the animated films of Ralph Bakshi and later Hayao Miyazaki, as well as Jim Henson's films; *The Dark Crystal* and *Labyrinth* were particularly influential. The works of artists such as Frank Frazetta, Boris Vallejo, Brom, Bernie Wrightson, Brian Froud, H.R. Giger, ►

## ⚡ SEAN'S SIGNIFICANT ARTWORK

### *The Nightfishermen*

*The Nightfishermen* is one of my personal favorites, and represents an image that I believe hits all of the right marks in terms of what I both love about art and wish to achieve in every piece I create. There is a certain amount of quirkiness to the characters, and an expression of atmosphere and mystery in this piece that perfectly expresses the world that I travel in my own daydreams, and that I sometimes see hints of in movies or books, but have always wished to explore further in my personal artwork. This piece is also a perfect snippet of what daily life is like in *The Great City of Gateway*, the fantasy world I have been creating in my sketchbooks and personal illustrative work.



copyright 2011 sean andrew murray





- Another vehicle exploration exploring the idea of magic as an energy source, resulting in different kinds of designs for modes of transportation



Möbius and in particular, Ian Miller (especially the work he did for *Warhammer*) made a huge impact on my desire to become an artist.

Later in life I began to appreciate the works of old Masters such as Albrecht Dürer, Hieronymus Bosch, Leonardo da Vinci, and Pieter Bruegel the Elder, as well as the classical illustrators Gustave Doré, Arthur Rackham, Alphonse Mucha, and Kay Nielsen. But the list certainly does not stop there. I have an extensive library of books featuring art and artists that I admire and am inspired by, including a lot of “art of” books for films, but there are too many to list here.

Lately, my largest source of inspiration has been the world around me. Opening my eyes to the idiosyncrasies of human life, and the things we build, has been a constant source for developing my personal project: *The Great City of Gateway*.

**“In order for me to do a great painting, I have to have a fully fleshed-out and realized drawing”**

#### Materials:

My main tools for art making have been fairly consistent over the past fifteen years or so. I use Bristol board, mechanical pencils, a mechanical eraser, and a kneaded eraser for the analog materials, and Photoshop, Cintiq and a scanner for the digital materials.

I do like to experiment occasionally, but these tools have worked best for me over the long run. I used to do a lot more pen and ink work, usually with Rapidograph pens or nib pens, and I am now attempting to work these materials back into my process. I swear by the Alvin Draft/Matic 0.3 mm mechanical pencil with B Pentel leads.

In terms of painting, in the past I have favored watercolor and acrylics, and on the rare occasion I do an original painting, those are my go-to materials. I experimented with oil paints in college, but did not enjoy it or get the results I wanted. I think much of this has to do with the fact that I see myself as someone who draws more than a painter. In order for me to do a great painting, I have to have a fully fleshed-out and realized drawing. This doesn't mean, though, that someday I won't pick up oils again and see how it goes. ►

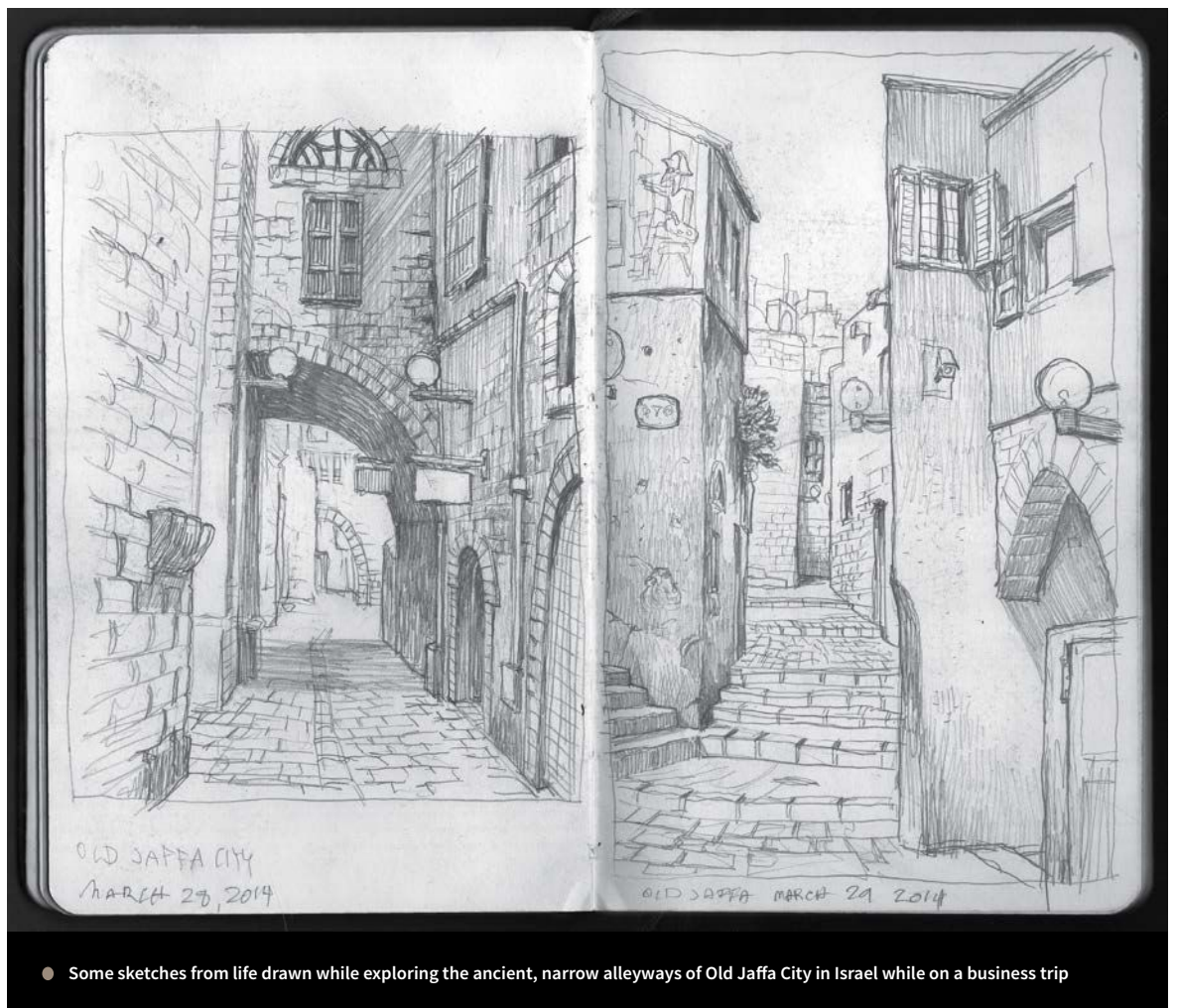


● Channeling an inner Ian Miller here – though abstract, this represents one of the darker corners of *Gateway*





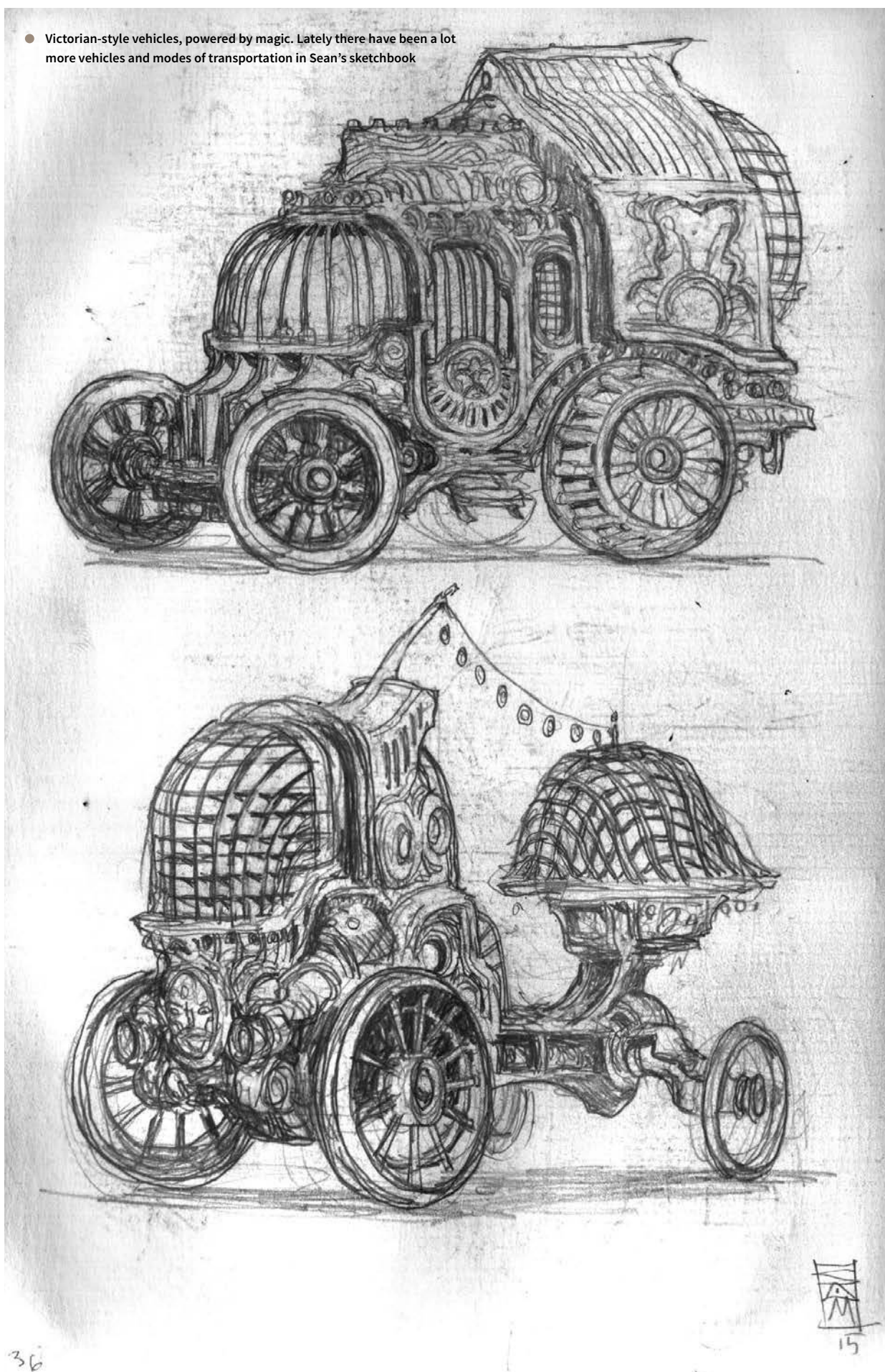
- Here is an example of a sketchbook spread exploring multiple ideas. The guy on the right is a result of a totally abstract shape sketch



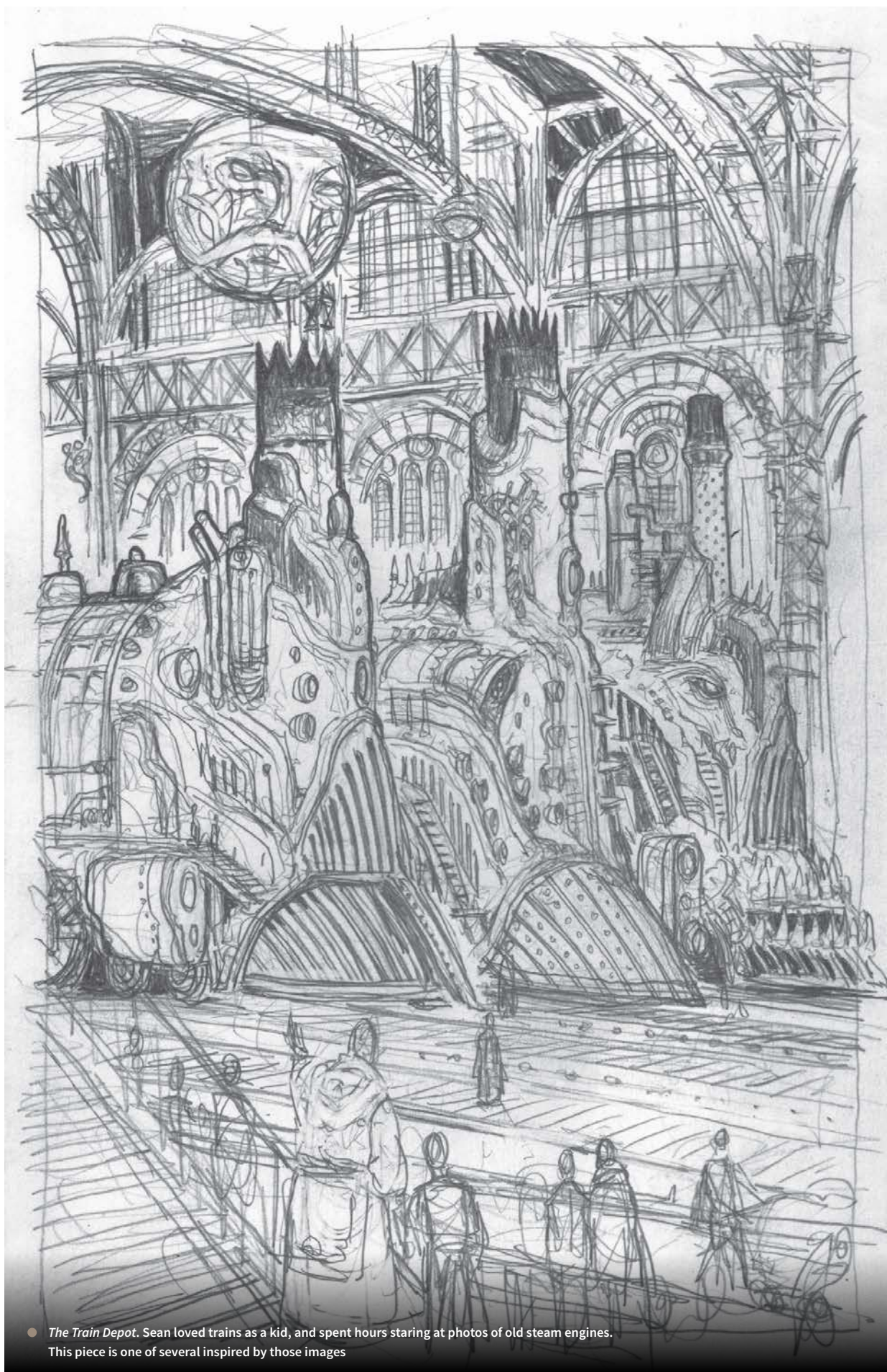
- Some sketches from life drawn while exploring the ancient, narrow alleyways of Old Jaffa City in Israel while on a business trip



- Victorian-style vehicles, powered by magic. Lately there have been a lot more vehicles and modes of transportation in Sean's sketchbook







● *The Train Depot.* Sean loved trains as a kid, and spent hours staring at photos of old steam engines. This piece is one of several inspired by those images



- *The Multi-Wizard*, this guy is the result of a successful, but morally-suspect wizarding experiment





**“I “find” or “arrive at” the idea, rather than starting with a pre-conceived idea and chasing it down”**

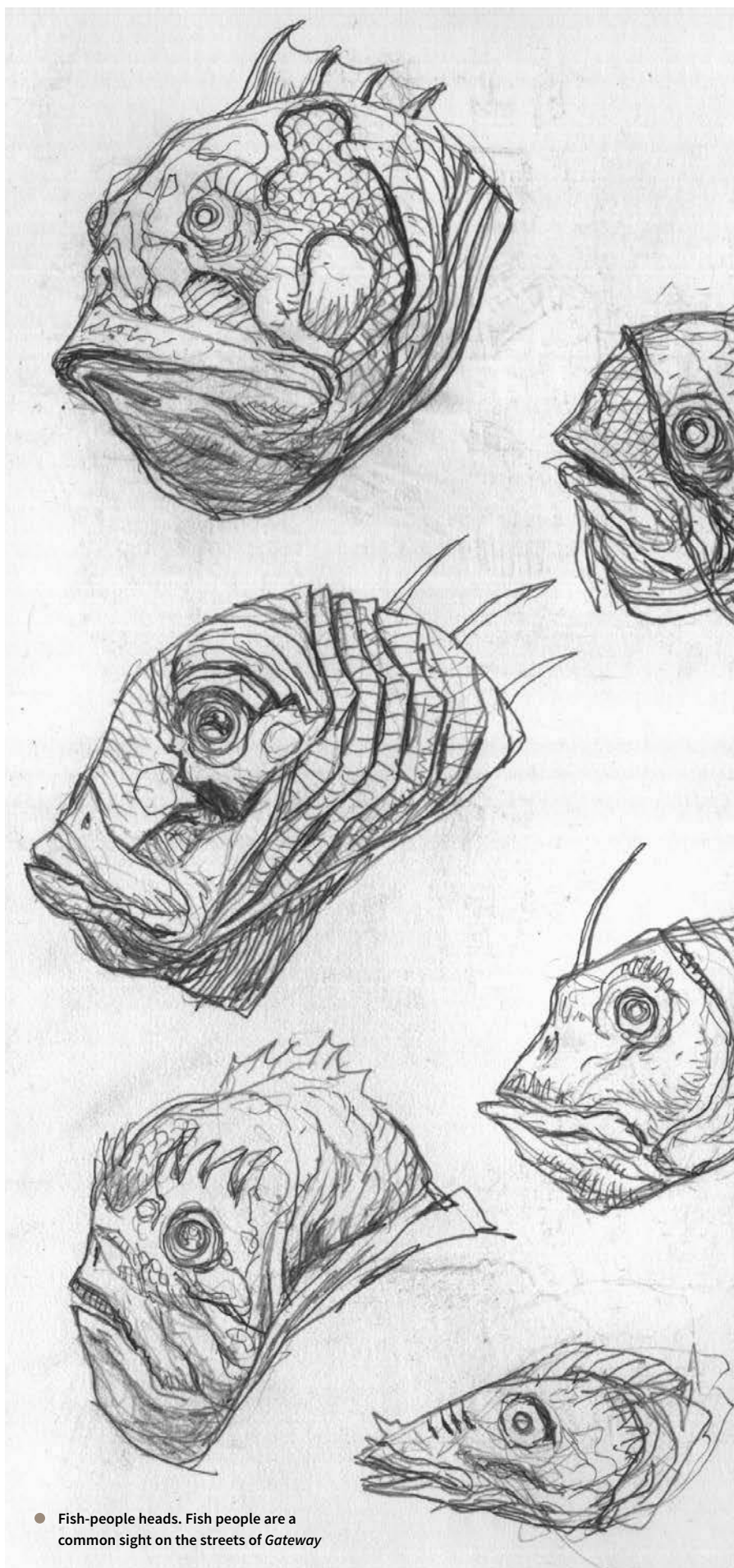
#### Sketching techniques:

One of the main techniques I use when sketching is the concept of starting with abstractions. I may not always know exactly what I am going to draw before I draw it. I will usually begin with the exploration of a shape, or the application of a shape to an idea that perhaps seems incongruous.

The final outcome of the drawing is a result of going through that creative exploration. I “find” or “arrive at” the idea, rather than starting with a pre-conceived idea and chasing it down. The best analogy I have is when we find imagery in things like clouds or ink blots, and so on. Your imagination kicks in here, attempting to find meaning in the meaningless. This, in my opinion, is the most creative and fun way to develop ideas.

The tricky part is to apply that approach when attempting to solve a particular visual problem. You have to avoid the temptation of letting your mind imagine the solution before you even start drawing, but all the while keeping that end goal in the back of your mind. This is harder than it sounds and I sometimes struggle with it, but it's not impossible. When it works, it's a lot of fun because you get to discover the solution for the first time, just as those who will view the image after you do.

Something else which I find helps me a lot in my sketchbook is starting with a box. Just having a small, simple parameter to work within helps me to focus and not get lost in an endless number of potential directions. ●



● Fish-people heads. Fish people are a common sight on the streets of Gateway







● *Prison City* is a small, island-based district of *The Great City of Gateway*. It is home to the Known World's largest felonious wizard population



## Would you like to see your sketches featured in 2dartist magazine?

We're always on the lookout for talented artists and their artwork to adorn the pages of our magazine. If you think you have what it takes, get in touch!

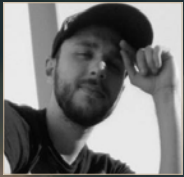
To submit, simply email Annie at [annie@3dtotal.com](mailto:annie@3dtotal.com) with a selection of your images or a link to your portfolio online, plus a little information about you.

We look forward to hearing from you!



# Art Gallery

Each issue the 2dartist team selects 10 of the best digital images from around the world. Enjoy!



## **Citadel Splendor**

**André Pinheiro**

**Year created:** 2017

**Web:** [andrepinheiro.artstation.com](http://andrepinheiro.artstation.com)

© André Pinheiro





Submit your images! Simply email [annie@3dtotal.com](mailto:annie@3dtotal.com)











### Shipyards #2

José Julián Londoño Calle

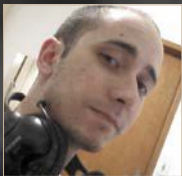
Year created: 2017

Web: [handsdigitalstudio.artstation.com](http://handsdigitalstudio.artstation.com)

© José Julián Londoño Calle







## Appearances

Daniel Bogni

Year created: 2016

Web: [danielbogni.com](http://danielbogni.com)

© Daniel Bogni



Daniel Bogni

[danielbogni.com](http://danielbogni.com)  
[art@danielbogni.com](mailto:art@danielbogni.com)





**Sorcerer**

Hyeon Kim

Year created: 2014

Web: [artstation.com/artist/hhhyeon](http://artstation.com/artist/hhhyeon)

© Hyeon Kim







**On a dark planet**

Vladimir Manyukhin (Mvn78)

Year created: 2017

Web: [mvn78.artstation.com](http://mvn78.artstation.com)

© Vladimir Manyukhin (Mvn78)





© M.B.H. 78









**crashing**

Tony Zhou Shuo

Year created: 2017

Web: [artofzs.com](http://artofzs.com)

© Tony Zhou Shuo







## Lilith's adventure

Naz Nemati

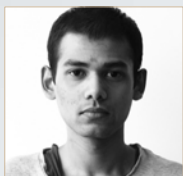
Year created: 2017

Web: [naznemati.artstation.com](http://naznemati.artstation.com)

© Naz Nemati







## Happy Year Of The Rooster! [2017]

Sudhan L.

Year created: 2017

Web: [artstation.com/artist/sudhanl](http://artstation.com/artist/sudhanl)

© Sudhan L.



新年快樂

SUDHAN | 2017





**to death**

Ömer Tunc

Year created: 2017

Web: [artstation.com/artist/mertun](http://artstation.com/artist/mertun)

© Omertunc











# Dwarf

Jesús Campos

Year created: 2017

Web: [artstation.com/artist/nerkin](http://artstation.com/artist/nerkin)

© Jesús Campos



# Sketch WORKSHOP



An innovative and fun way for people of all ages to find the inspiration to pick up a pencil – and draw!

The Sketch Workshop incorporates a luxury leather-style folder that can securely hold a workbook and up to 20 quality drawing tools. We've created a number of workbooks that cover popular topics including:

**ANATOMY**

**CHARACTERS**

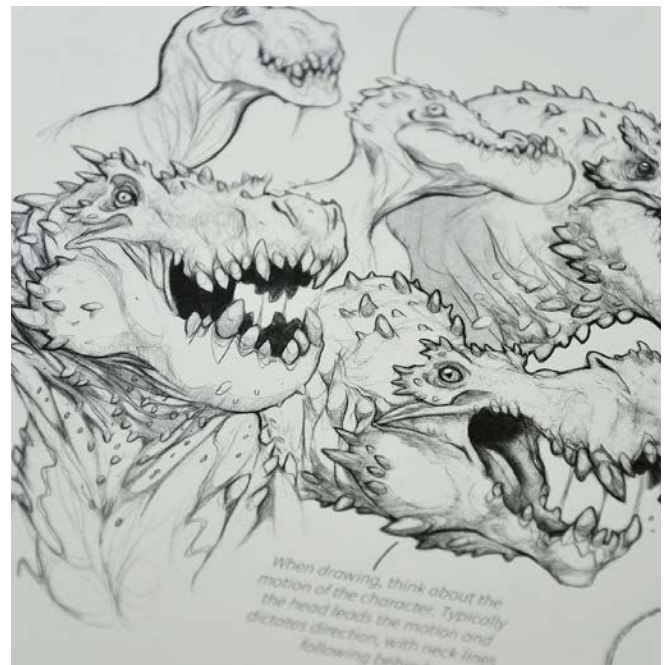
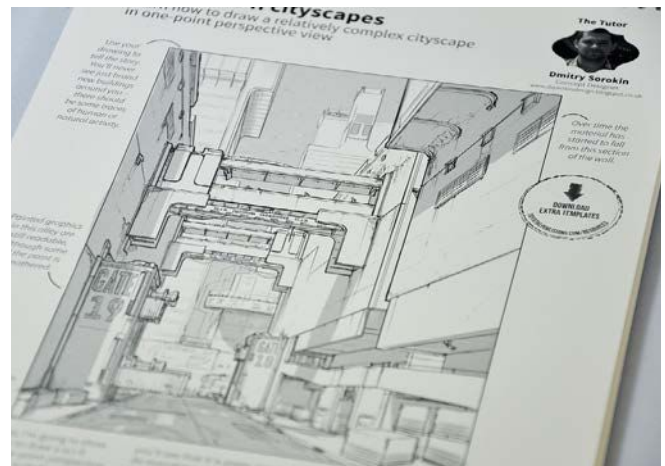
**CITYSCAPES**

**CREATURES**

**ROBOTS & SPACESHIPS**

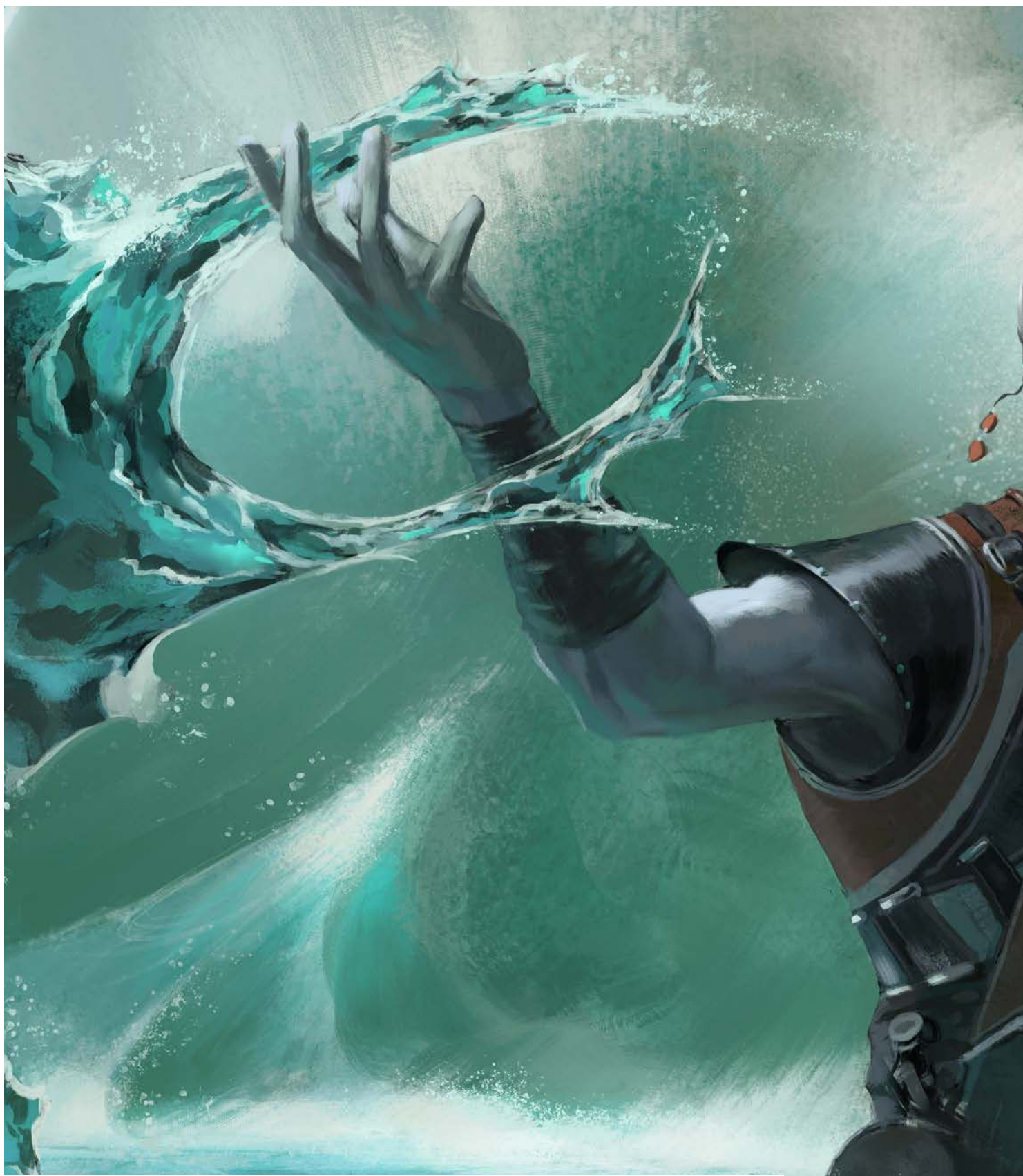
Designed to be easy to carry and use on the move, this beautiful art resource offers a complete sketching solution for beginners, hobbyists, and artists looking to brush up on drawing skills, with tuition by pro artists.

For more information on the folder, workbooks, and drawing tools, please visit: [shop.3dtotal.com](http://shop.3dtotal.com)



**SIGN-UP TO THE 3DTOTAL NEWSLETTER**





# Speed painting magic effects: water

Illustrator and artist Klaus Pillon explains how to use photo references to create believable water magic effects [▶](#)







## The Artist



**Klaus Pillon**

[klauspillon.com](http://klauspillon.com)

**Software Used:**  
Photoshop

Freelance concept artist and illustrator Klaus Pillon graduated in 3D production before focusing on his primary love: 2D artwork. Largely self-taught, he has worked professionally since 2013 for games and movies.



## Learn how to paint water magic effects...

In this tutorial I will show you how to speed paint an illustration of a water wielding mage. We will cover the use of thumbnailing and sketches to find an interesting composition that will put the focus on the magic effect but also reveal an interesting character, and how to think about your lighting depending on the needs of the illustration during the first steps of the painting. You will then be able to see how you can research, use, and rely on photo references to understand your subject matter. This will help design a convincing effect that will in turn help you when choosing your color palette and mark making.

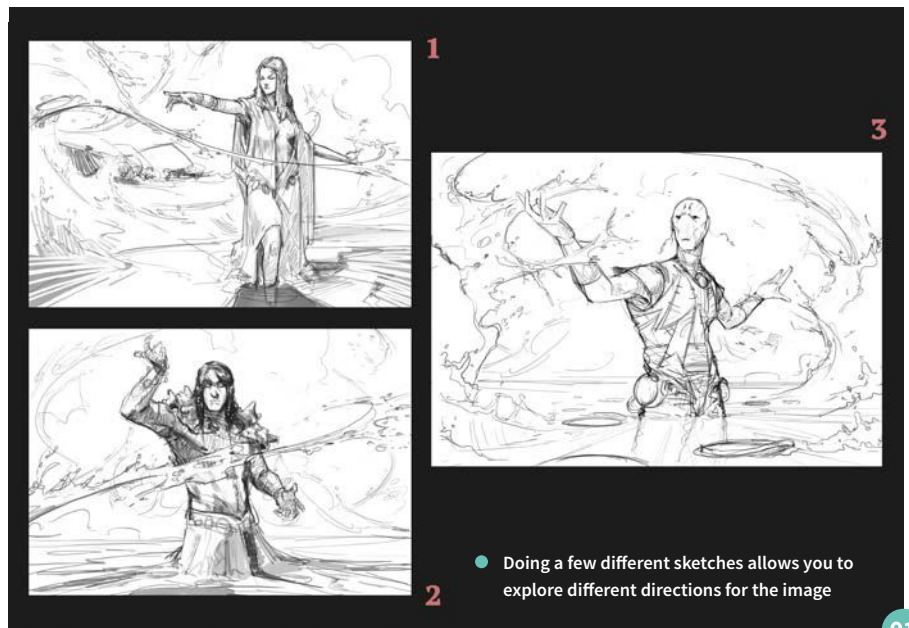
**01 Line sketches:** Let's start with a few sketches; line sketches are a quick way to lay down a composition as well as the pose and basic character design, without worrying about values or colors. At this stage it is important to see if your image is powerful and reflects what you want to portray. For this illustration we will be putting the emphasis on the water magic and the mage character will be secondary, so you will want to keep the composition quite simple.

In order to better understand how water behaves, I recommend you spend a bit of time looking at pictures of water in motion, especially high speed photos. References are definitely going to help you find good movement for the water, to show the mage controlling the water.

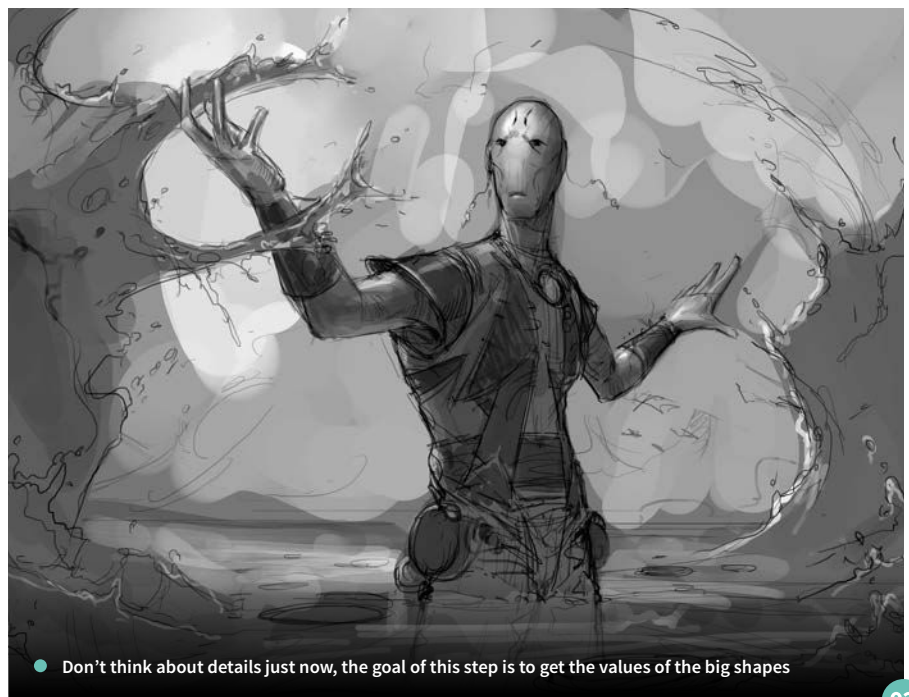
As you work on the sketches you may want to recycle some of the ideas from previous sketches to get the look you want. For example, I like the idea of the mage being in the water, so I recycled this in my third sketch.

**“Looking at your references will be very useful at this stage to help you understand the colors that you can find in water, depending on the lighting scheme that you choose”**

**02 Lighting and values:** You have the lines and basic composition/design sorted, so you can start laying down some values on a separate layer below the line sketch, or with the line layer set to Multiply on top of the values layer.



01



02

## PRO TIPS

### Breaking the elements

When studying references, try to break the different elements of the picture into manageable, understandable chunks. For example in this tutorial I looked at many photos of water and tried to break down the different colors that I saw in order to understand the whole better. It is also something that can be fun and that you can do every day, wherever you are.

### Studies

It is always a good idea to do studies of everything whenever you can, whether for a particular project or just for yourself. In the end the knowledge that you get from these will stay with you forever and add up over the years, enriching your visual library.



This is a crucial step as it will dictate the abstract impact of your image. You should think about silhouettes and how to use them to make the character pop, and how you want the viewer's eye to move across the page, using positive versus negative space to create an interesting silhouette.

This is also the time to think about the lighting because values, silhouettes, and light are closely intertwined. Having the light at the top left will make the character's face pop and help the water to stand out. This choice of lighting is also dictated by the water effect itself as the references will help you understand how the light should hit the water for the effect you are trying to create.

### 03 **Color sketch:** The next step is to put some colors on top of this sketch.

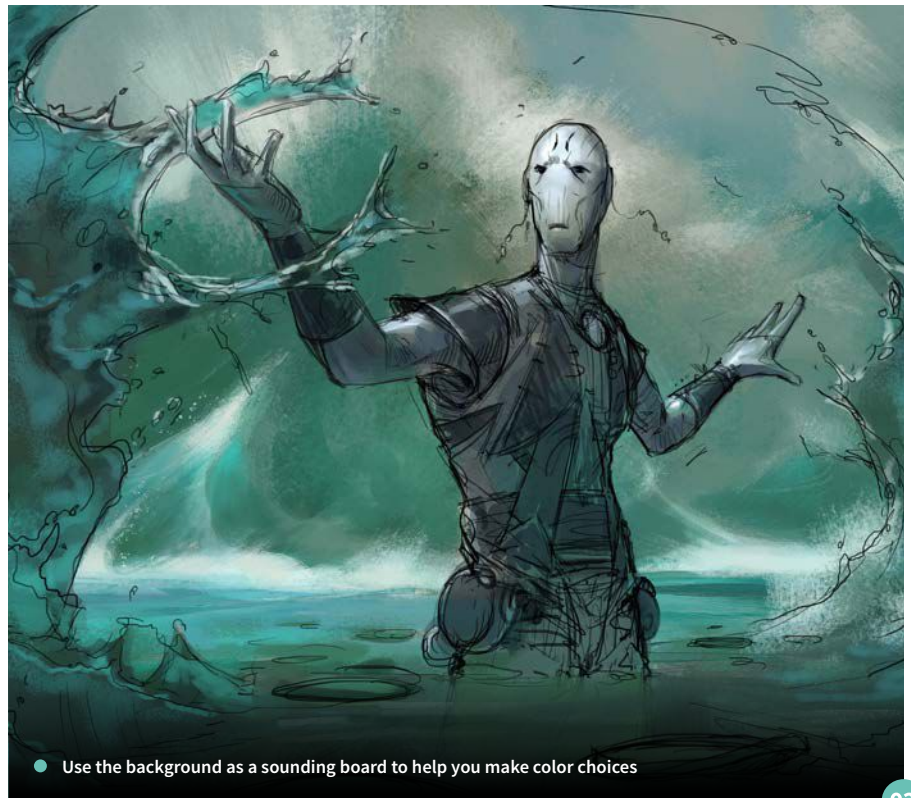
Looking at your references will be very useful at this stage to help you understand the colors that you can find in water, depending on the lighting scheme that you choose; for example, the colors won't be the same at high noon than during a sunset. Using a layer on Overlay blending mode, I start adding some colors on top of the black and white sketch, which will be the base color layer that you will build upon.

When you are happy with the base color, cut the main elements of your image (the character and water in the foreground) and put each one on its own layer, then merge with the line layer that goes with it; this will help with future steps.

Create a new layer for the background and use a couple of textured brushes to begin applying new colors with a painterly approach. You don't want to define too much, instead focus on showing movement as you want the background to contrast rather than compete with the detailed foreground.

### 04 **Refining the composition:** You should have almost everything ready to start the detailing/rendering phase of the process. Take the opportunity to adjust the composition – this is where having elements on separate layers comes in handy!

In my illustration I decide to remove some of the water from the left to create a more interesting silhouette and add more movement from the top left corner to the end of the character's arm on the right side of the picture. To help make the silhouette stand out more against the



● Use the background as a sounding board to help you make color choices

03



● Don't be afraid to make big changes, especially early in the process

04

background create a new layer set to Screen mode and paint some light coming from the left.

In order to enhance the focus on the character, put some notes of warm reds that will contrast with the cool colors of the water an Overlay

layer; this will attract the viewer's eye towards the mage. You may want to crop off the bottom part of the canvas, this serves to bring the character closer to the viewer. It is a good idea to explore and reassess your image as you progress, which keeps the process organic. ►



**05 Refining the character:** Even though this tutorial is showing you how to create magic effects, the main focus of your illustration will still be the character because this is what the viewer will be looking at first and foremost. Defining and detailing the character before you work on the rest of the image will help you to work out the amount of detail and rendering the rest of the painting needs. So keeping the main source of light in mind, you can start to refine the mage; I have chosen to make my character very pale, with blue-gray skin reminiscent of a shark – this helps to link him to the water.

Water is a reflective material so you should also pay attention to how it reflects the light back on to the character, to help ground him in the environment you should light him from below with a blue-green tint. I recommend using references for the pose, especially the hands; you can easily find references on the internet or just take your own, they will greatly help with the realism of your illustration.

**06 Refining the background:** Now that the character is mostly done you may want to make his head stand out even more to push the focus on to it. To do this create a new layer set to Screen mode on top of the background layer, and with a dark blue-green add more light behind his head, as if the sun is hitting the top of the waves behind him.

When you are happy with the mage you can move on to refining the waves. For this you need to understand how light and water work together: water is colorless but highly reflective and is capable of reflecting all the colors in the environment. At the top of a wave is where sunlight directly hits the water and it is mostly the sun that is reflected back, whereas lower down on the wave is where the sky is reflected back and will appear turquoise, and finally the darkest part of the wave is the ground reflected back on the water and will be dark blue in color.

**07 The still water effect:** Here we want the water magic effect to appear as if the water is still to help sell the narrative that the mage is in control of the water. With the help of high speed photographs you can break up the different colors of the water in order to get a better understanding of how the reflection works and recreate the effect in your illustration. For the foreground water work closely with the



● Use references for difficult areas of anatomy such as the hands



● Understanding how light works in different conditions will greatly improve your illustrations



● Use a hard brush to get sharp edges on the reflection



references to paint the water, after that it is just a matter of artistic choice on how you want to stylize it. Make the outer parts of the water reflect the light from the sun using an almost white color, and add a couple more highlights inside to show that the water is not completely flat. The darkest colors are the reflections of both the character and the ground below, and in between there is a range of colors which are the refraction of the sky and waves behind the water.

**08 Varying the water:** Once you have the main still water effect done you can go on to refine the rest of the water effects; you will want to make sure you add variety to the water to create interest and movement in the illustration. To paint in the different colors of the water use at a hard brush and carefully make the marks along the edges of the sketch. Try to create a clear movement with each wave, as if the water is slowly moving up.

You will also want to have the water increase in motion the further away from the character it gets, and in order to do this switch between hard and soft brushes as you move further away from the mage. This will also help have the focus stay on the still water that is closer to the character. Be careful not to over detail the water in too many places and also don't go overboard with texture, instead try playing with the contrast of simple versus complicated to lead the eye over the image.

**“Layer masks are great because if you erased a part you shouldn't have you can always bring it back”**

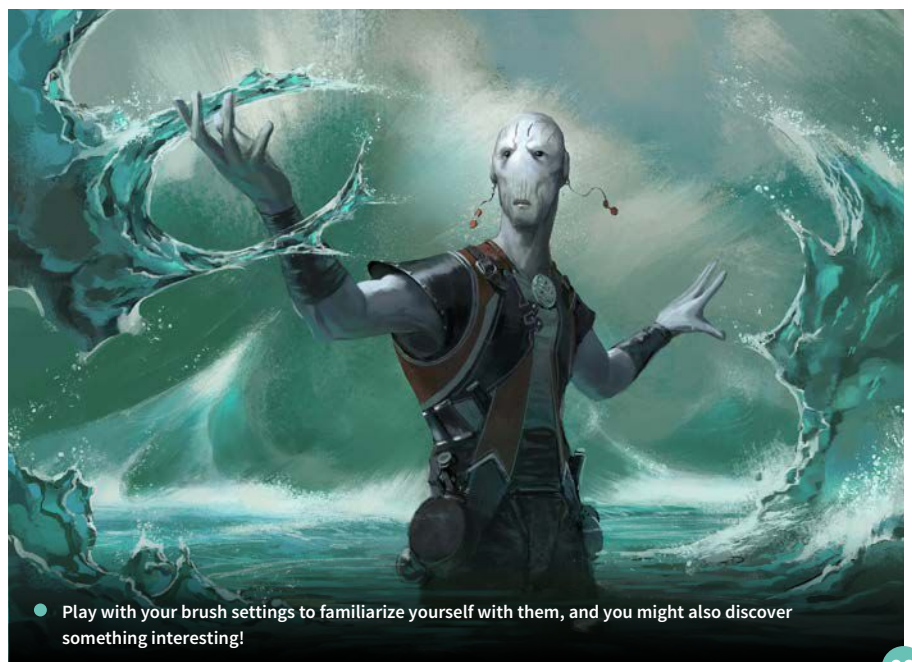
**09 Smaller details:** To add a bit more detail and dynamism to the waves it is a good idea to add some water and foam droplets that follow the movement. Apply drops on top of the waves, or where you feel that the movement of the water is breaking. To do this use a couple of different dotted brushes on a new layer on top of everything. Apply the strokes and then create a Mask layer to safely erase what you feel doesn't work or where it is too much.

Layer masks are great because if you erased a part you shouldn't have you can always bring it back. You also need to be careful not to create dots that are too similar in size and shape as this will result in a loss of



● Varying the look of the water will give you interesting results

08



● Play with your brush settings to familiarize yourself with them, and you might also discover something interesting!

09

dynamism and movement in your work. Contrast is your friend every step of the way. With another textured custom brush and with the same layer mask technique you can also create some foam on the surface of the water that will add detail and movement, as well as adding some depth.

**10 Last adjustments:** Before calling it a day you should spend a bit of time playing with the colors, levels, and saturation to see if you can enhance the overall look and feel of the piece. For this you can use a lot of different tools; the best way is always to explore and play with the features in Photoshop, you never know

what kind of happy accident you can stumble upon! Use a Levels adjustment layer (Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Levels) to increase the light in the background and use the layer mask to paint in the light. This allows you a greater control over the areas you wish to lighten or darken as opposed to having an overall contrast increase.

With another layer set to Screen use a dark blue-green color to paint a little bit more of the reflective light at the bottom of the character. Be careful to use these changes in a subtle manner otherwise you can end up with too much contrast (lights too light or darks too dark). With these last minute adjustments done you are finished! ●









## The Artist



**Klaus Pillon**  
[klauspillon.com](http://klauspillon.com)





# Capture a changing seascape

Concept artist Eduardo Rodriguez shares his top tips for painting a plein air seascape, and handling a constantly moving environment ▶



## The Artist

---



**Eduardo Rodriguez**

[erodriguezart.blogspot.co.uk](http://erodriguezart.blogspot.co.uk)

**Software Used:**

Photoshop

Eduardo Rodriguez is a 2D artist who enjoys concept art and illustrations. He is currently a freelance artist in Los Angeles and works in the mobile game department at Disney Interactive.





## See how layer masks can help you quickly adjust your plein air scenes...

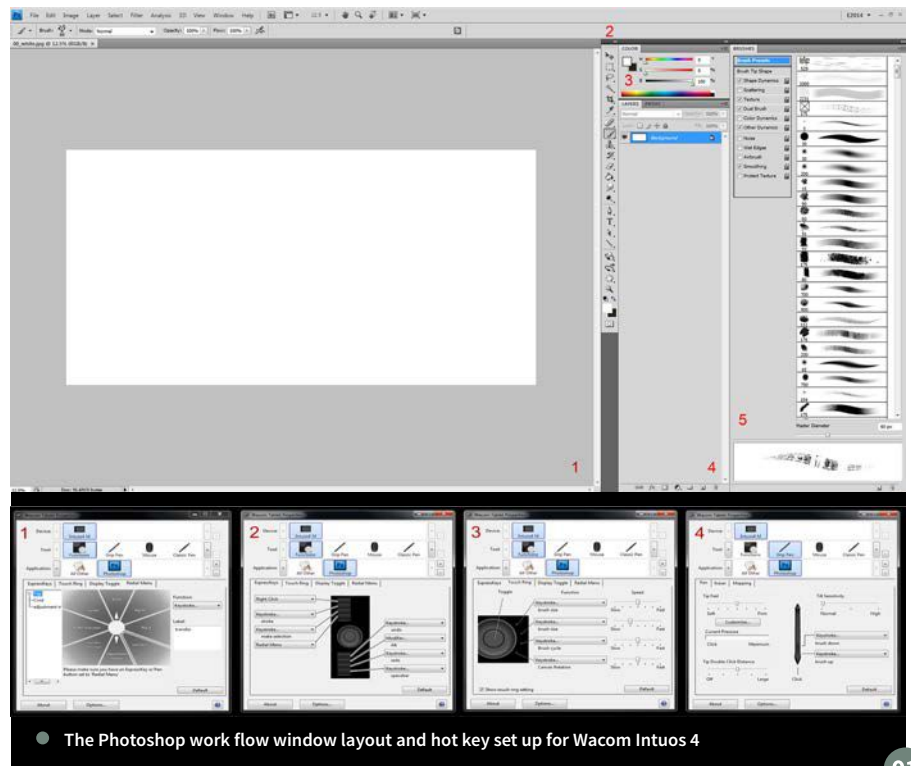
This is a digital plein air painting tutorial of a beach scene. Plein air painting is the art of painting from direct observation of the subject matter and the subject matter is usually landscapes. This practice has been around since the time of the Renaissance art masters and it is used to study and make finished art pieces. What has changed are the tools used to create plein air paintings. The traditional oil paints, brushes, and canvas can now be replaced with a digital device, stylus, and painting software.

The benefit of doing digital plein air painting is that you can directly apply what you learn in the field to the work you do in the studio. You will study light in different scenarios and how it affects different materials. The techniques and workflow you use in the field will be the same as those you use in the studio. By using the same digital tools in the field and in the studio, it will improve your knowledge of the tool and make you faster. Also, you won't have to worry about paints getting on your clothes or running out.

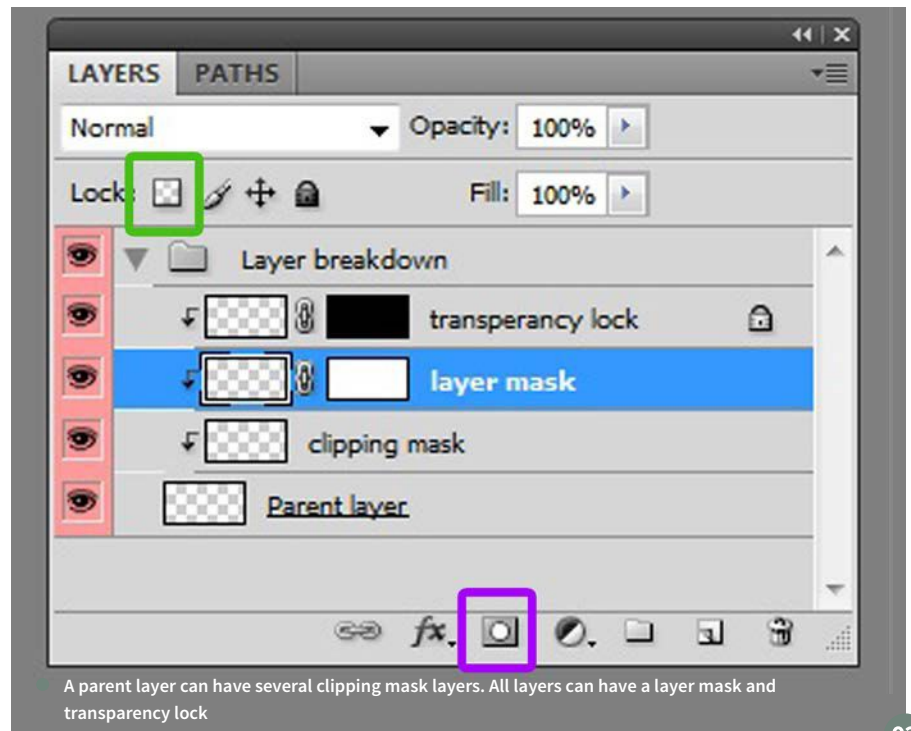
I learned digital plein air from Shaddy Safadi. This method of painting makes full use of all the features in Photoshop. Among other things, it embraces the use of layers, texture brushes, color menu adjustments, and the ability to make adjustments. However, many other painting software have similar features and so you can use the same techniques.

**01 Workflow set up:** Digital plein air starts at home with your digital device set up. I use Photoshop, a Wacom Intuos 4, and a Dell 15 inch laptop. Open Photoshop and arrange your windows in a way that makes it efficient for you. Since I am right handed, I like having all my windows on the right side and my digital canvas on the left side. Also, set up hot keys (or shortcut commands) on your keyboard and Intuos. With enough practice, using hot keys will be automatic and faster than manually opening menus and clicking.

**02 Understanding layers:** This digital plein air process depends heavily on layers. Therefore it is important to understand



01



02

how to use them. Paint the silhouette of an object in a layer (a parent layer). Create clipping mask layers by holding the Alt key and clicking on the gray line between two layers. Clipping mask layers are identifiable by the downward pointing arrow. Create a layer mask by clicking on the icon (circled in purple on image 02). Lock layer transparency by clicking on the icon (circled in green). Put all the layers in a folder to make global adjustments or collapse layers.

**03 Equipment set up:** You have to have the right equipment to be able to paint comfortably outdoors. Start by fully charging your digital device. You might want to pack an extra battery, external charger, or AC cable. For the set up, have two camping stools; one for your computer and the other for you. Put your laptop inside a collapsible black box. You can visit Shaddy Safadi's website to learn how to make a collapsible black box.



Use a tripod and clamp to hold an umbrella. Depending on the place and weather, you might not need to use all the equipment. Other helpful things to have are: a smart phone, head phones, snacks, appropriate clothing, hat, and finger cut gloves.

**“Nature presents you with infinite compositions. Your part as an artist is to make design choices to improve them”**

**04** **Photo compositions:** The joy of plein air is that you get to travel to beautiful locations and paint them. Nature presents you with infinite compositions. Your part as an artist is to make design choices to improve them and tell a story. Image 04 illustrates how



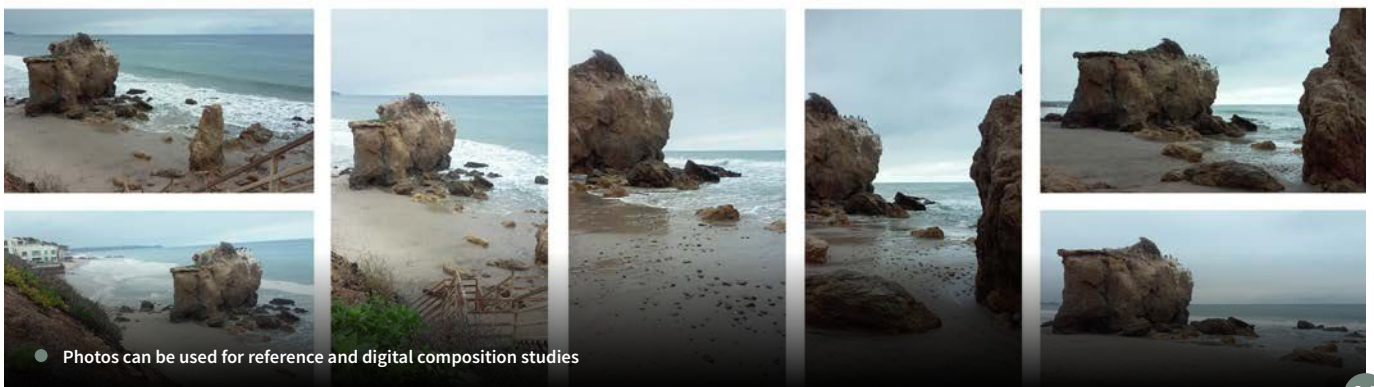
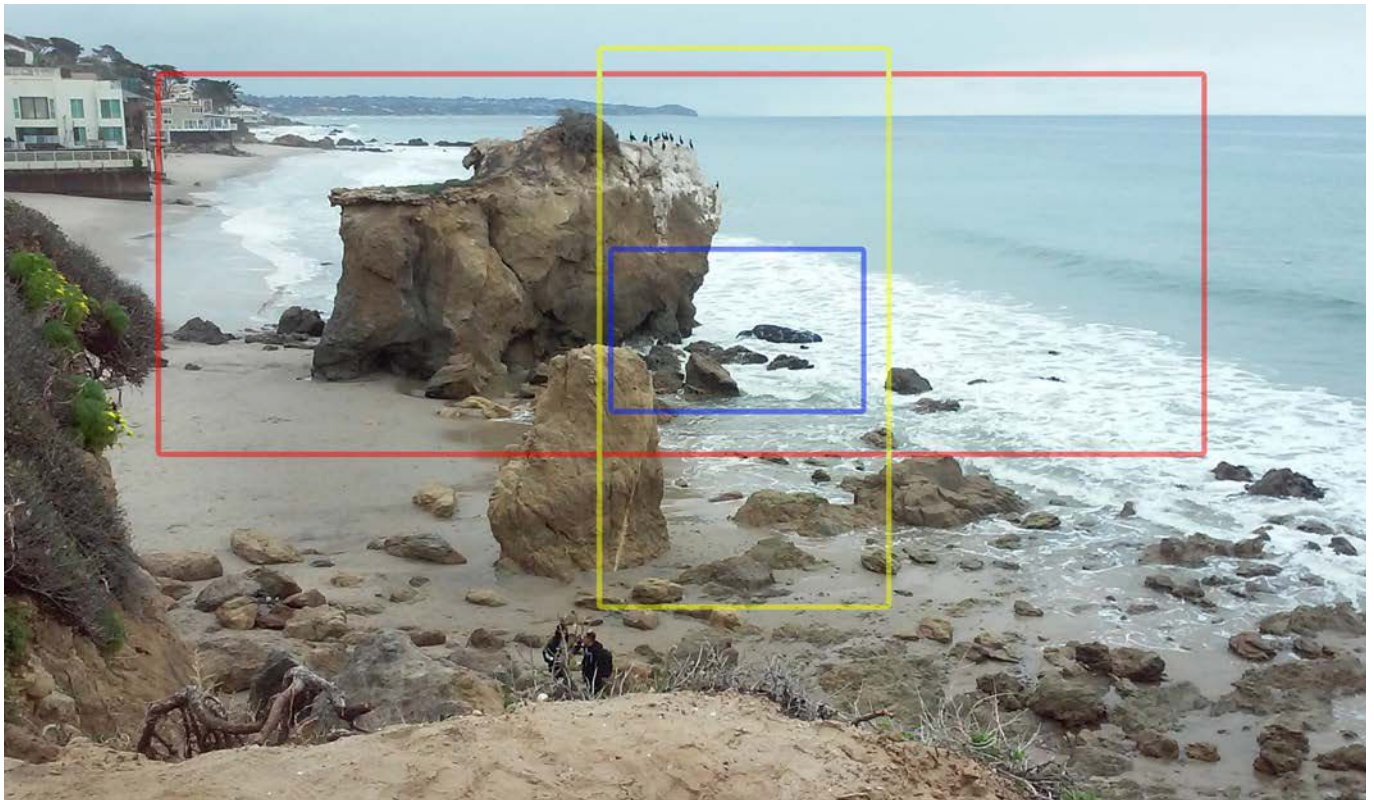
● An example of the tools you will need and how to set them up



03

you can create several compositions from one site. You can use a view finder, your fingers (as movie directors do), or sketches to make

composition studies. I like to use photos. Photos are also useful for recording moving objects such as waves, animals, and lighting. ►

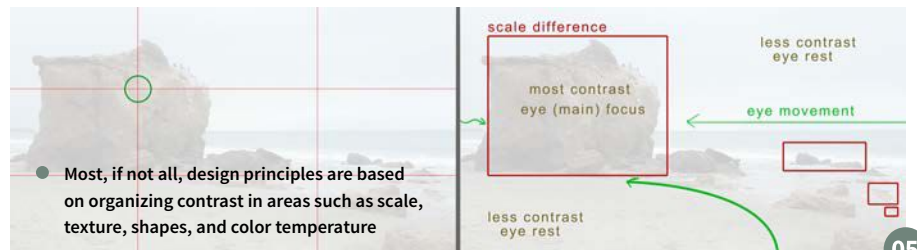


● Photos can be used for reference and digital composition studies

04

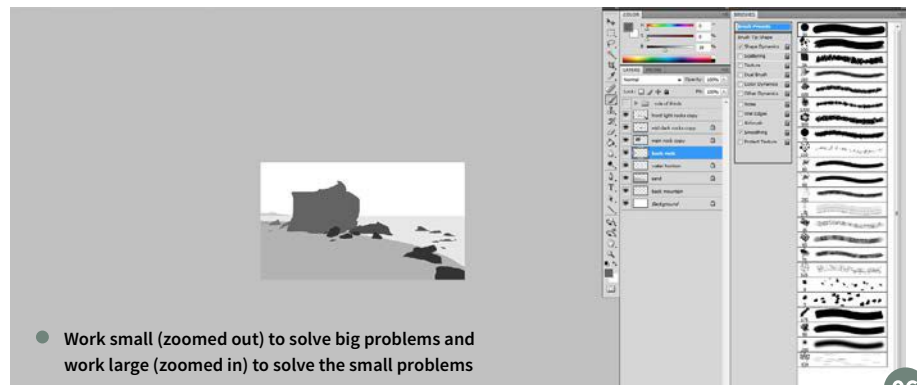


**05 Composition principles:** The rule of thirds is a good way to start framing your composition. Place your main focus on one of the four places where the lines cross. In the chosen scene, the main rock is on the upper-left cross point. Other design principles to consider are: eye movement, scale, and the contrast of detail areas. In the chosen scene, the rocks, horizon, and background guide the eye to the main rock. There are big, medium sized, and small rocks. The rocks have a lot of texture and details while the sand and sky have fewer.



- Most, if not all, design principles are based on organizing contrast in areas such as scale, texture, shapes, and color temperature

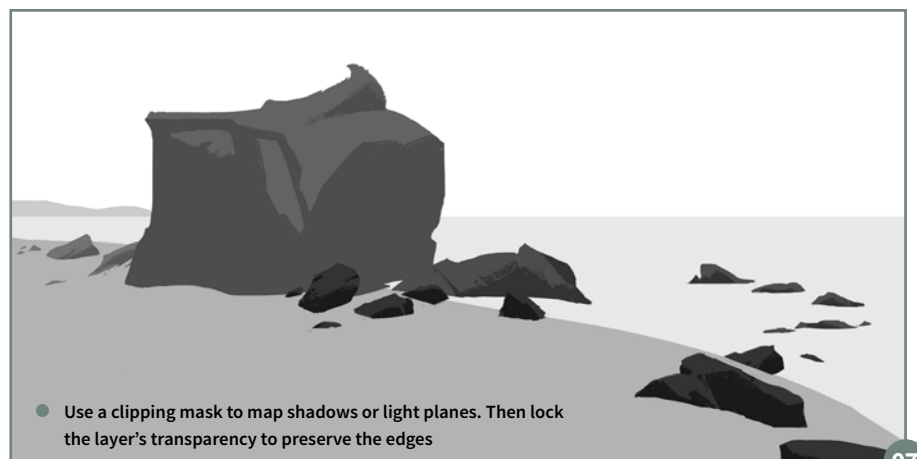
**06 Layout in silhouettes:** Zoom out of your canvas to work small. If the layout looks good in thumbnail size then it's going to work in any size. This is the most important part in the process, so take the time to create a good layout.



- Work small (zoomed out) to solve big problems and work large (zoomed in) to solve the small problems

The layout will consist of silhouettes. Use grayscale values to separate foreground, middle-ground, and background objects. Focus on shapes, scale, and placement. Consider how shapes relate to each other and put each major object in its own layer. Lock the layer's transparency when you are satisfied with the silhouettes. Remember to save your file now and then as you continue working.

**07 Shadow mapping:** The first set of clipping mask layers are used for the light planes. You can also work



- Use a clipping mask to map shadows or light planes. Then lock the layer's transparency to preserve the edges



- Take photographs of things that move constantly, such as waves





● Squinting your eyes will also help you see the average color of shadows and lights

09

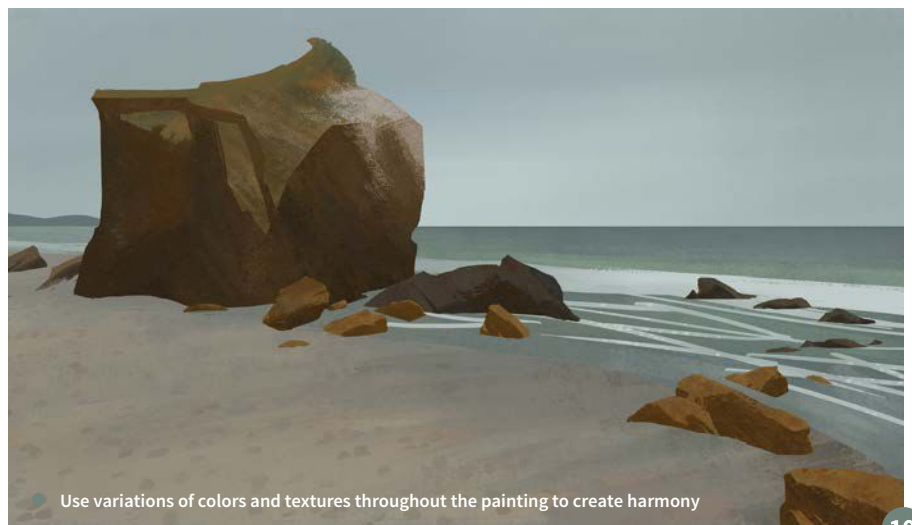
inversely where the silhouette layer is the light planes and the clipping mask is the shadow planes. Group all light planes into one value. Squint your eyes when viewing the real scene to help you group the values.

Let the real light and shadow planes guide you but design them when you place them in your painting. In this painting, I designed the light planes in a way that help guide the eyes towards the giant rock. At this point, start using texture brushes to refine edges.

**“With things like waves that are constantly moving, you need to observe them to understand their behavior”**

**08 Add waves and ripples:** The painting process is one of continual adjustments. Make the value of the water dark then in a new layer, design the waves and ripples in a lighter value. With things like waves that are constantly moving, you need to observe them to understand their behavior. Paint the gesture of the wave and ripples.

Also take into consideration that the wave and other elements follow perspective. Strokes should get smaller as they move back into space and straighten (horizontally) closer to the horizon. Adjust the value of the



● Use variations of colors and textures throughout the painting to create harmony

10

mountain in the background to separate it from the new value of the water.

**09 Local colors:** Color is relative. It needs to be compared to another color to be able to form an opinion about it. Use the Hue/Saturation/Brightness (HSB) color menu to select colors. Look at the real objects and paint its average color.

Paint in solid color, using the Paint Bucket tool to fill in shapes. It will make it faster. Locking transparency will keep color within its parameters. Adding color might reveal areas where you accidentally painted in another layer.

For example, you may accidentally paint water in the sky layer. Clean up things like this as you work.

**10 Color and texture variation:** Use the Eye Dropper tool to select a color that already exists in the painting. Create variations by slightly moving the Hue, Saturation, and Brightness sliders in either direction. Change the temperature of a color by moving the saturation slider.

Apply the colors with the fewest amount of strokes possible so the texture of the brushes remains visible. Start with large-sized brushes and use smaller sizes as needed. ►



You might make a stroke with one brush and erase or paint into its edges with another brush to vary the border between colors.

**11 Modeling forms:** In an overcast day, there isn't a significant value change between light and shadow planes. Planes might be hard to see in the real objects so apply your knowledge of how forms turn. For example, in a cube, each plane has a different value. In a spear, there is a gradation of values.

**“The sand tones gradually get cooler as they recede into the distance because of atmosphere perspective”**

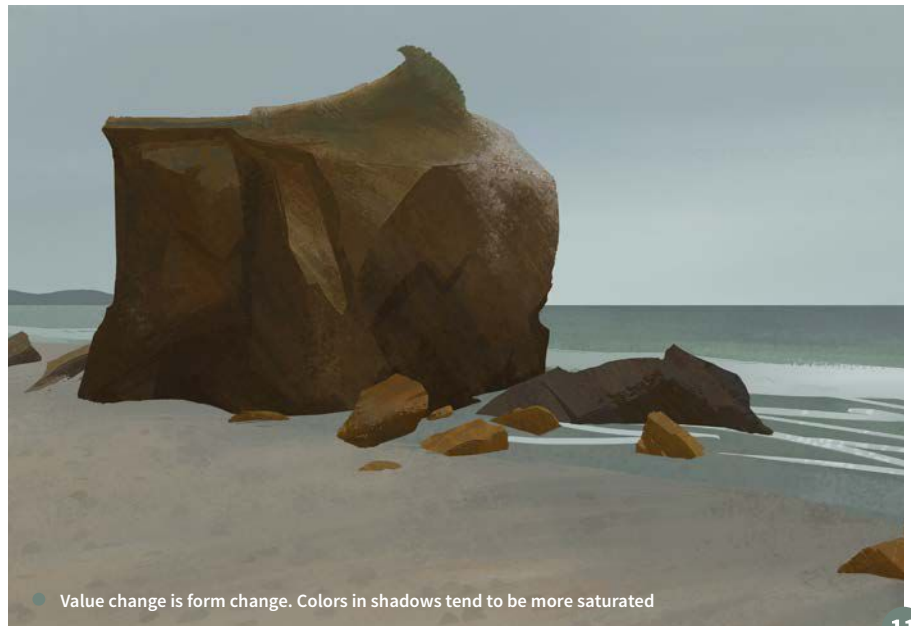
In the giant rock, I copy the shadow clipping layer. Use the Hue/Saturation color adjustment window to create a darker and more saturated version. Apply a layer mask and fill it with black. Paint with white to reveal the darker planes within the shadow side.

**12 Refining water:** In a way, painting water is the painting of reflections. There is more color variation in the shore because of water transparency and reflections. The color of the sand mixing with the reflection of rocks and sky are the main elements of the wet sand.

In the center of the image, the darker saturated colors are reflections of the surrounding rocks. The cool light grays on the right side of the tide are reflections of the sky. Use a layer mask in the wave layer to design the shapes of the ripples. Use a texture brush to paint the splashes in the waves.

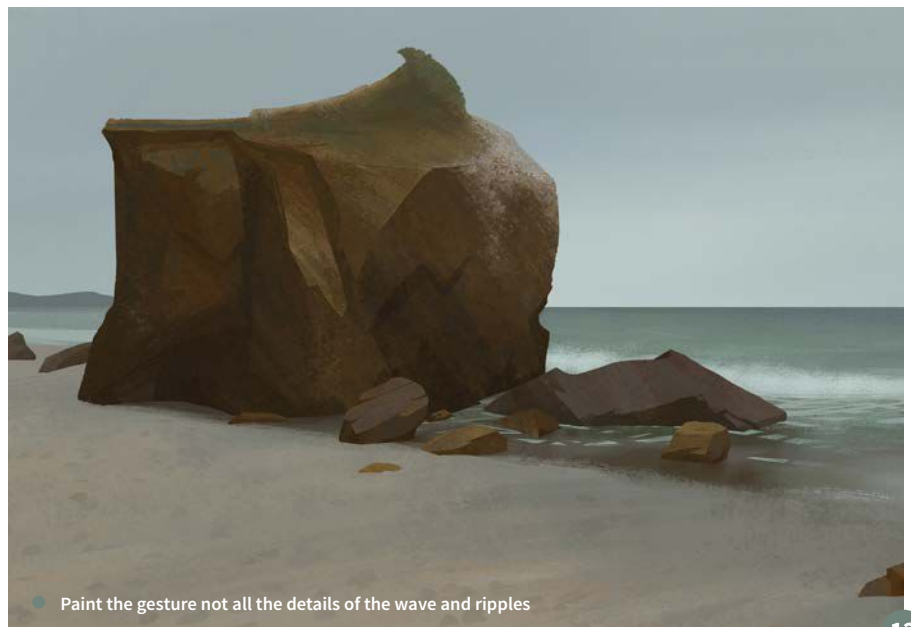
**13 Refining sand:** The sand tones gradually get cooler as they recede into the distance because of atmosphere perspective. Create the gradation by using the same technique as in step 11. Make a copy of the sand layer. Use the Hue/Saturation adjustment window to make the layer darker and saturated.

Use the Color Balance adjustment window to modify the hue of the layer. This is similar to a wash in traditional painting. Apply a layer mask and use a soft airbrush to blend the layers in such a way that creates a gradation from warm foreground sand and the cooler distant sand.



Value change is form change. Colors in shadows tend to be more saturated

11



Paint the gesture not all the details of the wave and ripples

12

## PRO TIPS

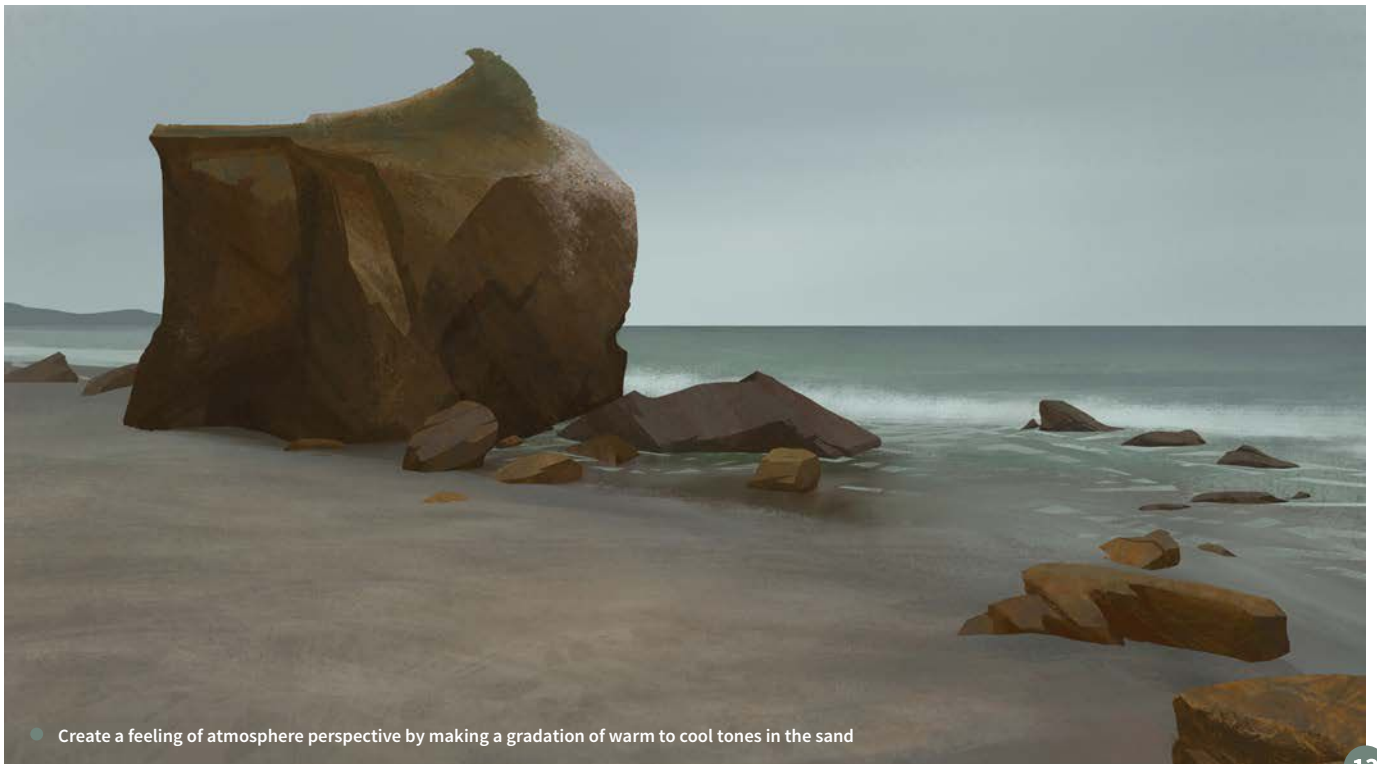
### Practice at home

If you are new to digital plein air, it is good to start in your back yard or near your house. That way, you practice the process of setting up the equipment, painting, and packing. By doing this at home, you can easily, quickly and comfortably make modifications. It might be that you need some bungee cables to stabilize your umbrella. Or you might discover that you like listening to music while you paint and so you might need to make a music playlist for times when you are in areas with no internet reception.

### Art reference

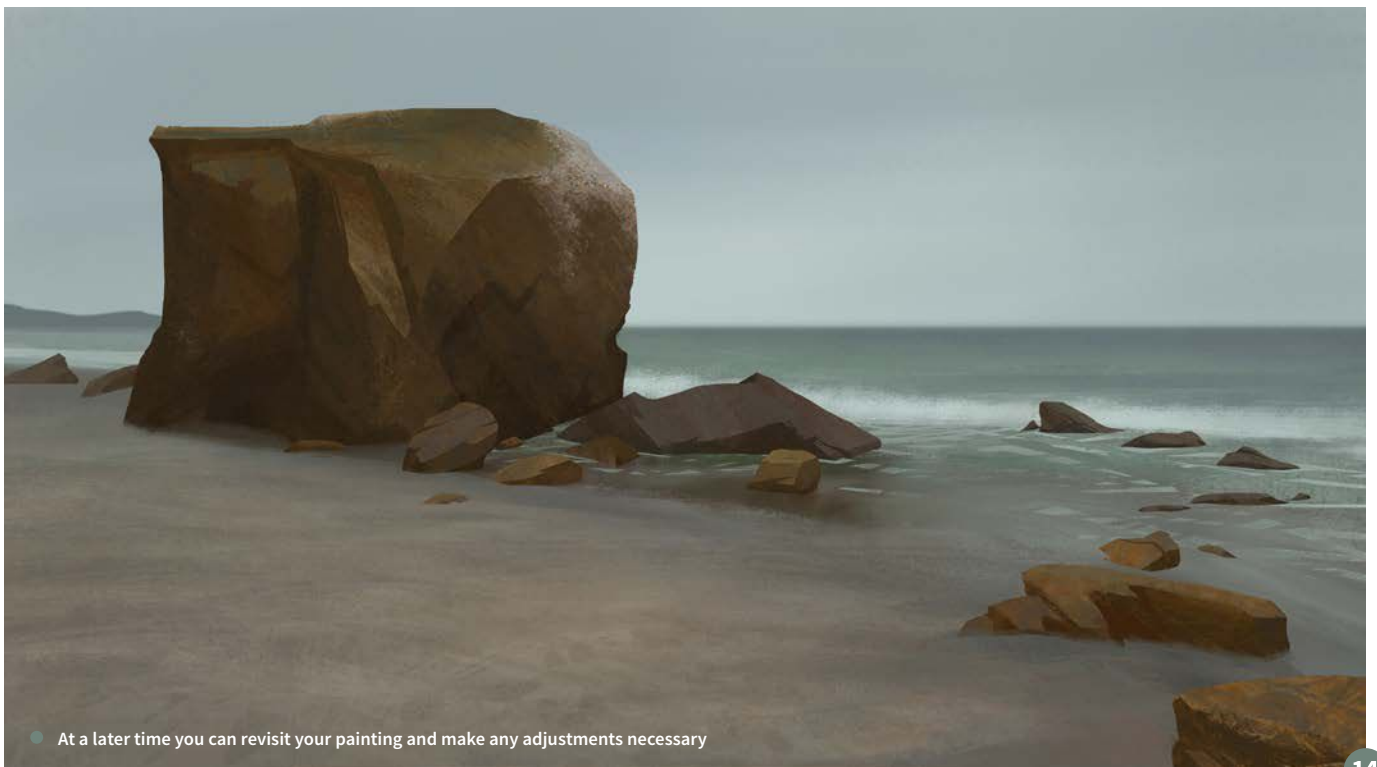
There are two types of references; real world and art. Real world references are to help you understand how the real world looks. In plein air, your real world reference is the scene you are painting. On the other hand, art references are artworks used to guide art styles or techniques. Set an intention of what you want to achieve with your digital plein air painting. Then find an artwork that demonstrates what you want to achieve. Keep it simple and only use one art reference image open in Photoshop. Refer to it as needed.





● Create a feeling of atmosphere perspective by making a gradation of warm to cool tones in the sand

13



● At a later time you can revisit your painting and make any adjustments necessary

14

**14 Homeshop:** A digital plein air painting might not be completed on site for several reasons; time restriction, a weather change, a digital device running out of battery, or you are hungry or tired. If your goal is to finish the painting, reopen the file at a later time and continue working on it. One of the benefits of this is that you will see the painting with a fresh eye and be able to

identify areas that still need adjustment. Blur edges of objects in the distance. I add sand to the bottom edges of some rocks and remove the hook from the top of the main mountain.

**15 Frame it and sign it:** You can add a digital frame to your painting. Make a duplicate file. Merge all the layers into one. Copy that layer. Navigate to Image > Canvas Size. In the

Canvas Size pop up window, check the Relative tick box. Add the size of the desired border then click OK. Adjust the color of the border. I usually color pick from the painting. That way the frame falls within the color harmony that has already been established. Lastly, add your signature. I will often type my signature on the border. You can also color pick and adjust the value so that the signature is visible but subtle. ●







## The Artist



**Eduardo Rodriguez**  
[erodriguezart.blogspot.co.uk](http://erodriguezart.blogspot.co.uk)

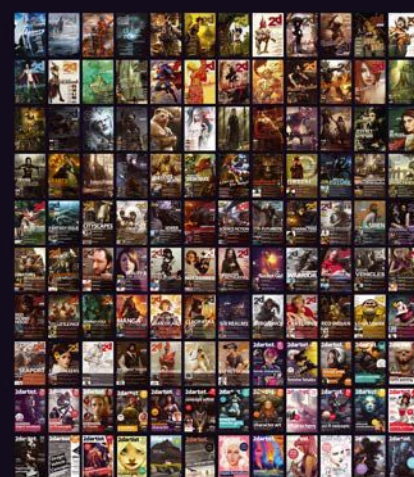


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# Plein air paint a ruin

Discover a new approach to painting stylized environments with freelance digital painter Maciej Sidorowicz [▶](#)





## The Artist



**Maciej Sidorowicz**  
maciejsidorowicz.com

**Software Used:**  
Photoshop

Maciej Sidorowicz is a freelance digital painter based in Warsaw, Poland. He creates illustrations mainly for the advertising market and animation.





## Work from real life to refresh your environment painting processes...

In this tutorial I will share with you my approach to digital plein air painting. I think the most important thing here is observation-understanding-redesigning. By observation I mean finding something that touches you and makes you stop and marvel for a moment. You have to grab the essence of this thing, and this is where the understanding part comes in.

You have to determine why what you see in front of your eyes is so special – is it the colors and shadow during the golden hour, or the composition of trees, or the shape of a road? Then, once you've grasped this, you have to apply it to your painting – make it a bigger, better idea instead of just copying what is in front of you.

Use it only as a direction and look for the answers to your questions (what are the colors of the shadows? How does the light react with different materials?) When you have those answers, the picture then becomes your interpretation of what you see. Sounds easy? It can be.

**01 Finding the spot:** When looking for a place to do some plein air art you should find somewhere that has something special or exciting about it.

For this tutorial I have chosen to paint an abandoned gas plant in Warsaw, Poland – I like it because it looks like a big, empty shell with interesting brick textures, and the broken windows give it a haunted look.

As you will be spending some time there it is a good idea to learn about the location/building; I read up on the gas work's history and watch a film about some urban explorers who investigated it.

I recommend that you take lots of photos of your chosen spot to use as reference later, and also just to add to your visual library. Taking these

**“Try to find ways to emphasize the parts that you like, resulting in a more interesting painting”**



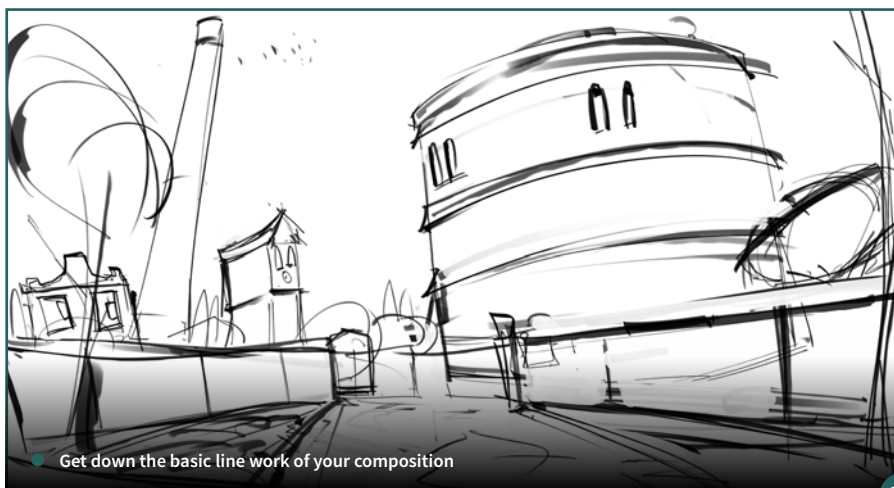
● Taking your own reference photos is a great way to build your visual library

01



● Your initial sketches don't need to be masterpieces

02



● Get down the basic line work of your composition

03

steps will help you to better understand what you are painting and to add a bit of soul to your art.

**02 Sketching:** Now you have learned about your location, you are ready to begin. I like to use an iPad and the

Procreate app, but you should use whatever is right for you. At this stage, explore ideas and experiment with composition, but make sure you use what you see as a reference. Try to find ways to emphasize the parts that you like, resulting in a more interesting painting.



**03 The light issue:** When doing plein air painting you can't change or control the lighting conditions, so it is useful for you to know some basics of how light works under different conditions. For example, when I was painting the gas works it was a cloudy day, the light was neutral and diffused, and there were no sharp shadows. Pick one of the composition sketches to work with and start sketching in the line work on a new canvas. You only need to get down the basic shapes as you will work on the details at a later stage.

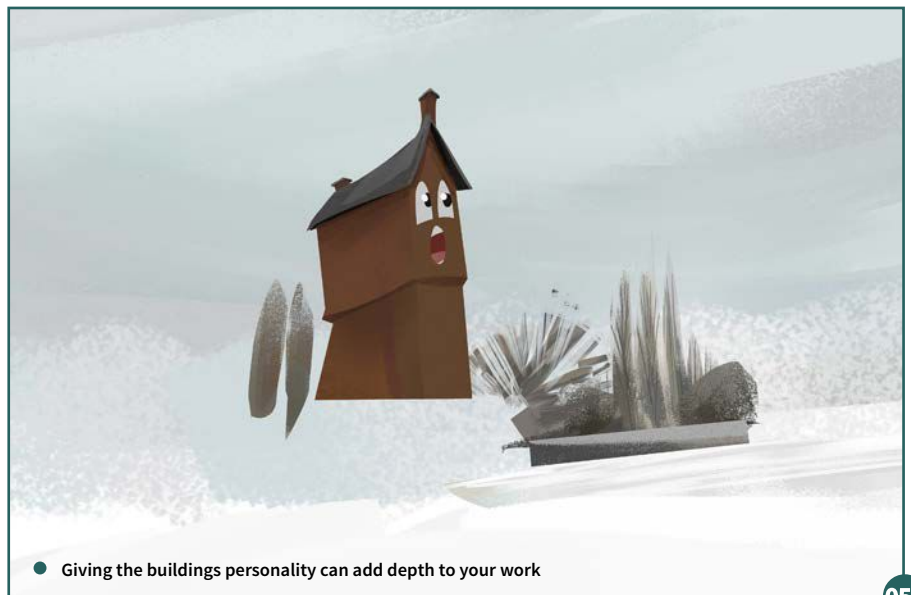
**04 Start painting:** I prefer to start my paintings with the background and move forward through the planes until I get to the foreground. It is important to keep each plane on separate layers so you can easily play with your composition and rearrange it at any point. Pick some colors to match the environment and loosely paint a sky in the background. To quickly add vegetation such as trees and bushes, use the Lasso tool (L) to roughly follow the shape of the tree and paint inside that shape. Do not use the Lasso tool to fill the shape with flat color if you want more natural looking vegetation, instead try leaving some space and irregularities; the Lasso tool is perfect for keeping the shape of the tree.

**05 Story inside the painting:** It's always good to have a bit of extra narrative inside every painting, even if you are doing ▶



● Build up the painting by starting with the background

04



● Giving the buildings personality can add depth to your work

05a



● Keep adding details to build up the story

05b





06

a practice painting or plein air. For example, I thought that all of the buildings look like characters – the gas works is a big, menacing bully, while the other two smaller ones are cowering next to him, a little overwhelmed and intimidated by the big guy. This is just one possible story I could apply to this picture, it adds spirit and interest to your paintings.

Quickly block in the buildings, adding a little personality to them if you want to; don't be afraid to adjust the shape and sizes to give the composition a bit more impact. Continue to build up the big details such as the buildings; remember to keep each plane on a different layer so you can make adjustments.

## 06 Moving forward:

Now is a good time to make any changes to the composition. Use your initial sketch from Step 2 for guidance, turning it on and off as often as you need to. Once again I recommend you use the Lasso tool to paint in the shapes of the next plane. In my painting I painted in simple shapes to create the ground and fences, and used the Lasso tool to add variation and texture. You do not need to paint all of the fine details of every building or part of the picture because you do not want to overload the viewer with too much detail.



07

It is much better to paint the parts of your painting that you want the viewer to focus on in more detail, and leave everything else less finished. Don't be afraid to reuse some of your elements to build up the layers, for instance I copied and transformed the tall thin building and pasted it in the background to add more interest in that area.

## 07 Atmospheric perspective:

Atmospheric perspective is what you

see when the particles in the atmosphere cause objects to appear paler and desaturated the further away they are. This can be achieved by gradually reducing the saturation of the objects as they move back through the painting towards the background. This is another great reason to keep each plane on separate layers, it makes it much easier to separate the planes of the picture by layers of fog. This adds depth to the whole piece. I'm also constantly moving the buildings here and there to check if the composition



can be improved – however, remember that it has to be clearly visible what's behind what – overlapping forms are a great tool to achieve that.

**08 Faster!!!:** As we are using Photoshop to paint digitally, we have access to a vast array of tools and techniques that help to speed up the process. To add details such as windows or doors create one on a separate layer and then use Copy (Ctrl+C) and Paste (Ctrl+V) to duplicate it. You will probably need to transform them to fit in with the perspective of the building. To do this you can use any of the transform tools such as Perspective or Distort (Edit > Transform > Perspective or Distort). This is a much faster method than individually painting each window.

Once you have placed all the windows and doors you can add different details and textures to them so that they are not all exactly the same; this will help to break up the uniformity of the duplicated details and also add interest.

**09 “To Do” Layer:** Often when you are working on your painting you might get an idea that you want to implement later in the process. I like to use a layer that I call “To Do,” placed on top of all the others to jot down any notes or line art ideas. You could put anything on this layer such as story elements, composition ideas, or just extra

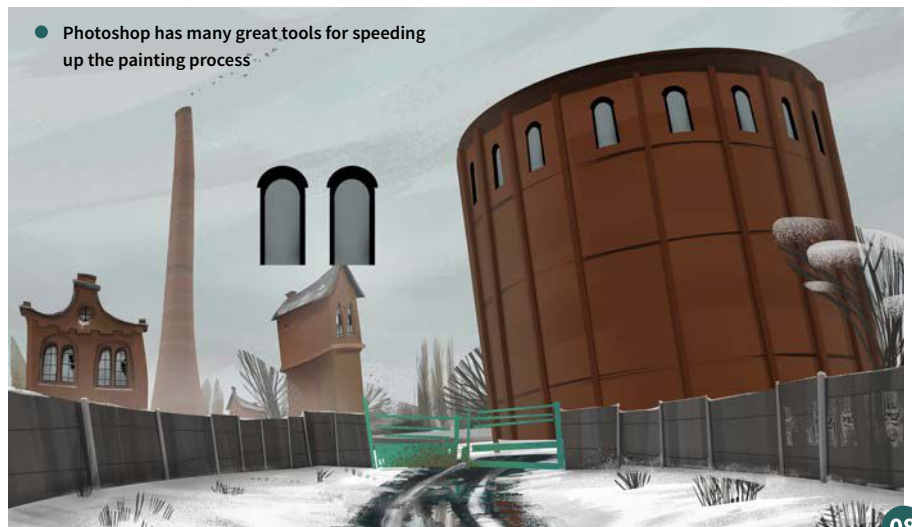
details. If you treat this layer like a checklist you can make sure you have got all the elements you want in your final painting. You are not tied to using everything you put here; you can just resign the ones that don't work for you.

I recommend that you take a couple of hours' break before you decide what to use, if anything; this way you will come back with refreshed eyes and be able to better judge what you need to do.

**10 Finishing steps:** Your painting should be pretty much finished; you should have all of the main elements and details in place. All that remains is to add any of your ideas from

the “To Do” layer and play around with filters to give the painting a polished finish. I decided to add a character standing in front of the gas works to add a bit of life and interest to the painting. It is important to think about where you are going to add these extra details, you don't want to distract from the main focus but rather enhance the narrative. I like to resize my paintings down by about 50%, this result is a much sharper and clean look to the lines; I also overlaid a grain layer set to 10% so it is only slightly visible, just enough to add a bit of texture. And with the final finishing touches added you are finished! ●

● Photoshop has many great tools for speeding up the painting process



● Using a layer to keep ideas on is a good way to make sure your work has all the elements you want







## The Artist



**Maciej Sidorowicz**  
[maciejsidorowicz.com](http://maciejsidorowicz.com)







# Fantasy fundamentals: perspective

James Wolf Strehle teaches you the cornerstones of perspective to help you improve your fantasy paintings ▶





## The Artist

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**James Wolf Strehle**  
[patreon.com/jameswolf](https://patreon.com/jameswolf)

**Software Used:**  
Photoshop

James Wolf Strehle is a concept artist and illustrator in the games industry. He works for Volta where he is afforded the opportunity to create art for some of the biggest games in the industry.



## Learn the essential rules of perspective...

In this five part series I will guide you through the fundamentals used to create a compelling fantasy image! We will look at crucial aspects of image creation including composition, perspective, value, visual effects, as well as a concluding segment that brings them all together. Each of these elements will be given their own article where we will be able to delve deep into why they are important and how they are applied. Becoming knowledgeable in these areas will give you the necessary tools to capture your imagination and release it to the masses in all its glory!

In part two we are going to focus on perspective. Now that we have the composition set it's time to refine the physical elements in the scene to give it a sense of realism. Having proper perspective

will convince the viewer that what they are seeing is believable and that they could walk into the scene to experience it for themselves. I will be going through the types of perspective you can use and explain how it can bring your image to the next level.

**01 What is perspective?:** Perspective is the technique we use to represent 3D objects in a 2D space. Using this technique will convey the illusion of depth and dimension on a flat surface in a way that feels believable and natural. To do this we employ various types of perspective including linear, atmospheric, color, and planar perspective. When combined, these techniques will create an extremely believable scene that acts as a window into your vision.

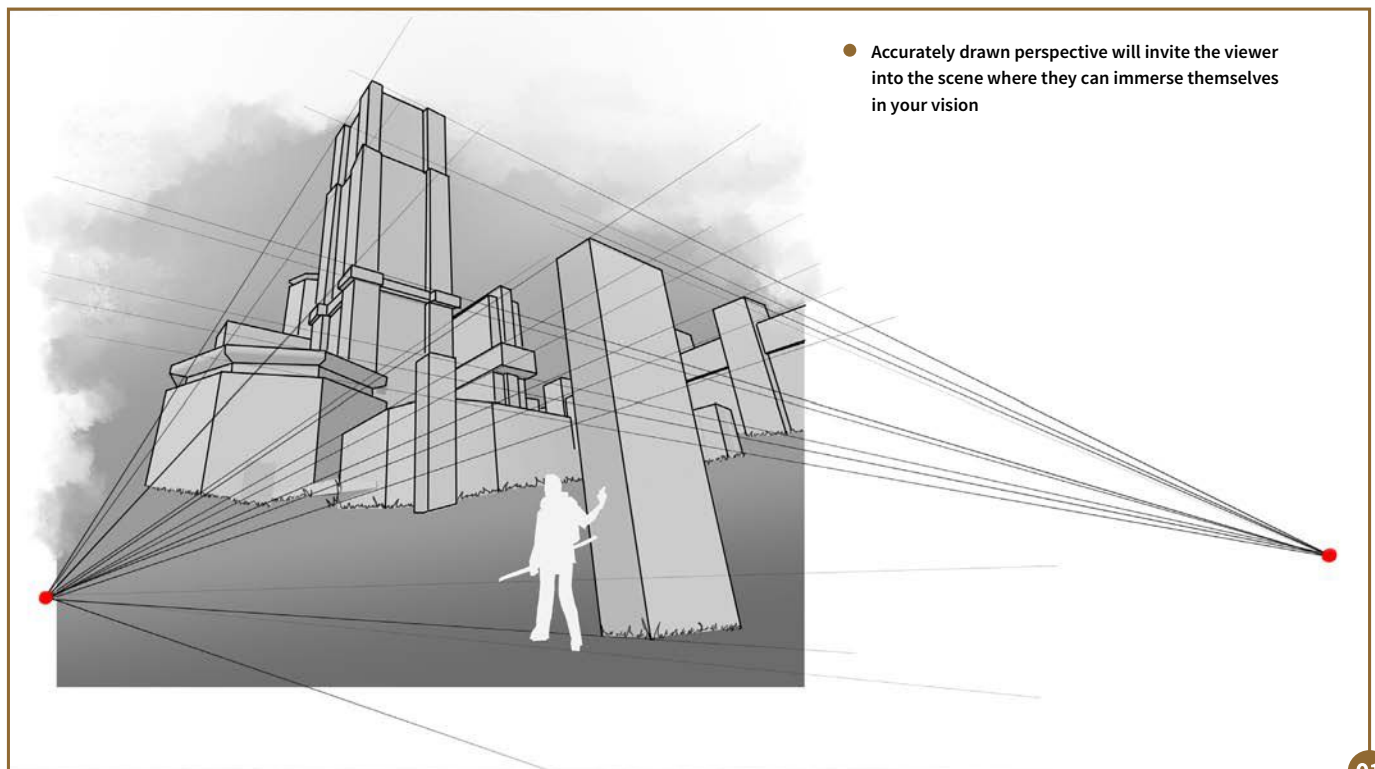
Perspective is important because it opens up a connection between the viewer and the scene. When the perspective is correct it invites them in with a sense of familiarity

owing to the fact that the rules applied in the real world also apply to the image. If the perspective is warped or incorrect we are unable to step through and imagine ourselves within the scene as an onlooker.

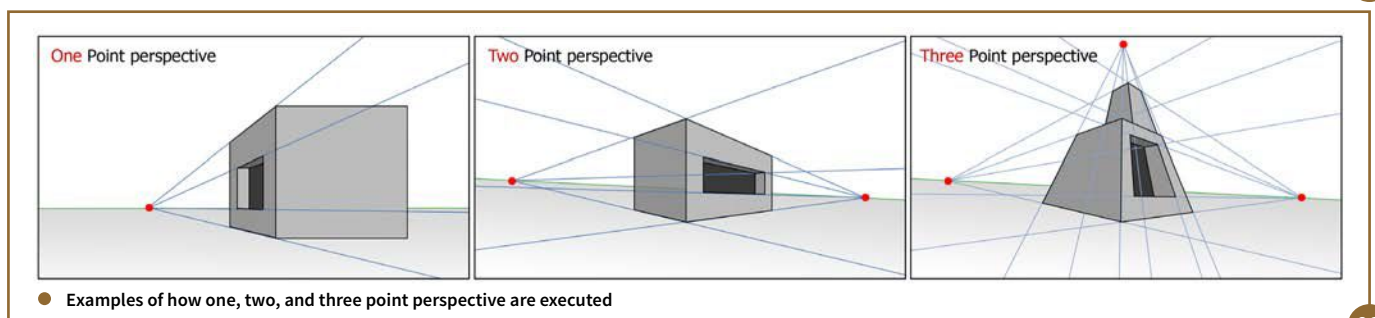
**02 The basics of linear perspective:** The idea behind linear perspective is that you are using a set of rules to help guide lines towards a vanishing point. Objects can then be placed along these lines, gradually shrinking in size as they recede back in space creating depth. There are three main types of linear perspective; one point, two point and three point perspective. The one, two, and three represent how many vanishing points there are in the scene.

When composing a scene it is good to figure out which one will best suit your needs.

When it comes to fantasy I often find myself implementing three point perspective the most as it adds a real sense of scale and

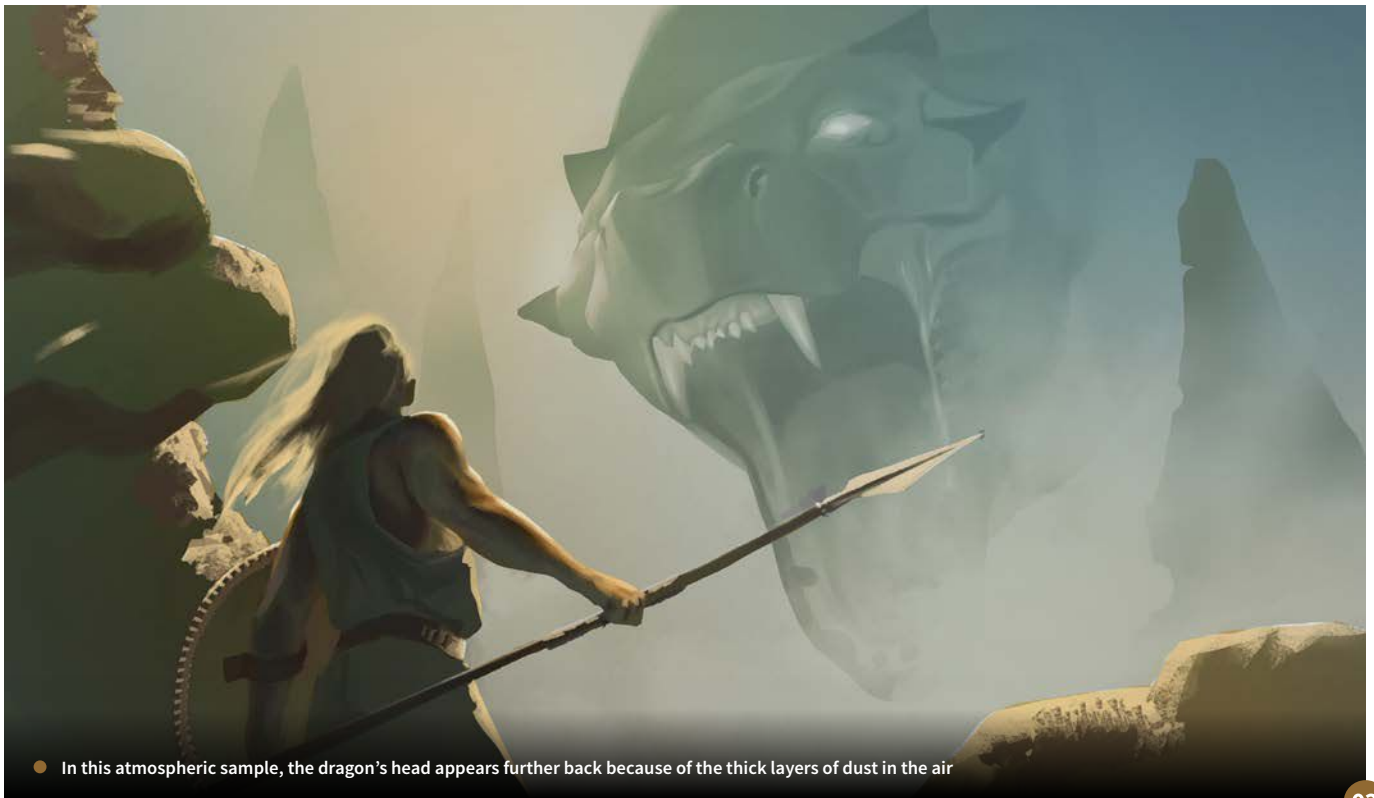


01



02





● In this atmospheric sample, the dragon's head appears further back because of the thick layers of dust in the air

03

grandeur. It has the ability to make you feel small in contrast to the grand exaggerations of fantasy. In the accompanying image you can see all three types of perspective in action.

**“The further away an object is from the viewer the less contrast it will have. The color saturation and details will fade and the object as a whole will generally shift towards cooler tones”**

**03 The basics of atmospheric perspective:** Atmospheric perspective is a method artists use to give the illusion of depth and recession to a scene. The further away an object is from the viewer the less contrast it will have. The color saturation and details will fade and the object as a whole will generally shift towards cooler tones. This happens because of the dust and particles in the atmosphere. As the object recedes, more and more atmospheric particles build up in front of it like thinly layered sheets. These particles also reflect the dominant light source, often times being that of the sky which is why the blue tint is so commonly used.

Using atmospheric perspective can create very dramatic scenes depending on the amount of particles in the air. Using one of ►

## ⚡ PRO TIPS

### Using details to your advantage

Details can either enhance or impair an image. When used correctly it can bring your subject forward, making it pop out of the image. On the other hand if it is overdone it can actually flatten the image and you will lose all depth you've been working to achieve. I like to focus most of the details into the main point of interest and gradually fade them out as I hit the secondary and tertiary interest points. Placing a heavily detailed subject over a background with very little detail will have an especially strong impact.

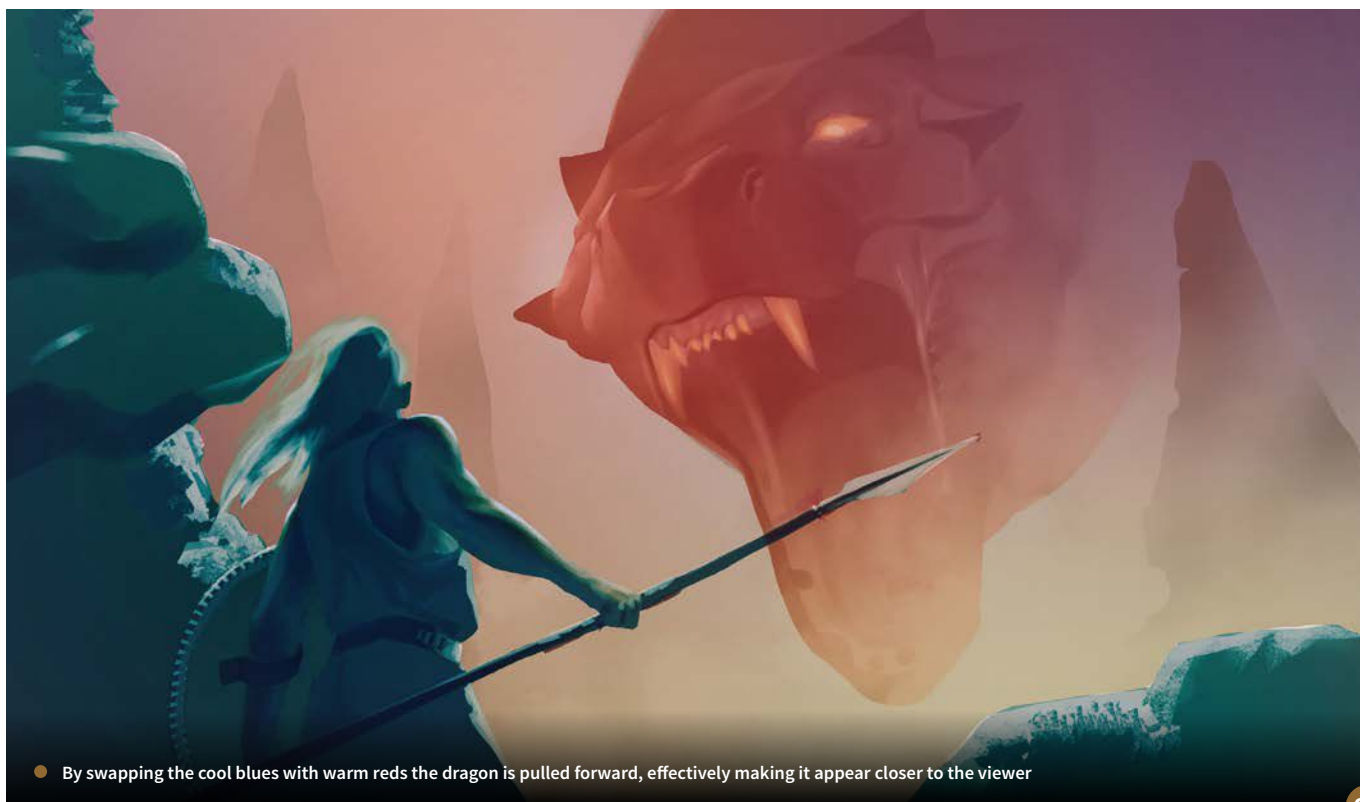




- By separating your image into three distinct planes, each with their own value ranges, your viewers can quickly understand the relationships of objects within your scene



04



- By swapping the cool blues with warm reds the dragon is pulled forward, effectively making it appear closer to the viewer

05

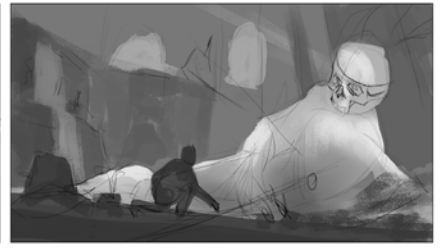
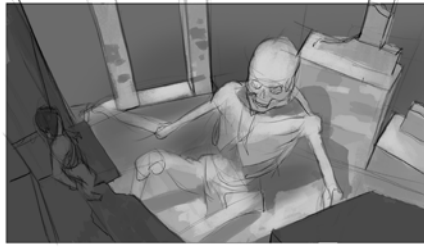
the sample images from the composition article, I have introduced depth through atmospheric elements. By doing this I have defined the space between the adversaries.

**04 The basics of planar perspective:**  
Another useful technique is to separate your image into distinct planes

(I like to define three main planes; the foreground, middleground, and background) by doing this viewers are able to get a sense of depth through comparing the layers. With this method you can draw attention to subjects that are particularly important to the scene; this works because each plane has its own variation of colors and values that help it

to stand apart from the other layers. You can see this in the example image; by keeping the foreground, middleground, and background in their own value ranges I am emphasizing the distance between the three, and highlighting the skeletal figure. This makes it easy for the onlooker to grasp the distance and relation of objects to each other within the planes.





● Various thumbnails are created in an attempt to discover the most suitable viewpoint for the scene

06

**05 The basics of color perspective:** While similar to atmospheric perspective, color perspective uses the whole range of hues to help provide the illusion of depth. Colors that are warmer will advance towards you while cooler colors will recede away. If you want to separate something from the background then warmer hues should be used, likewise if you want to push something back then cool it off a bit.

More so than the other techniques, color perspective tends to stick around with me until the very end of a painting. I am constantly pushing and pulling between warm and cool colors to make sure each element of the painting appears precisely where I envision it. By reversing the sample from atmospheric perspective (Step 3) I have switched the dynamics of the painting. The dragon now dominates the scene. The values remain unchanged but the beast is more threatening as if it is more aggressively lunging towards the warrior; this is all thanks to a swapping of hues.

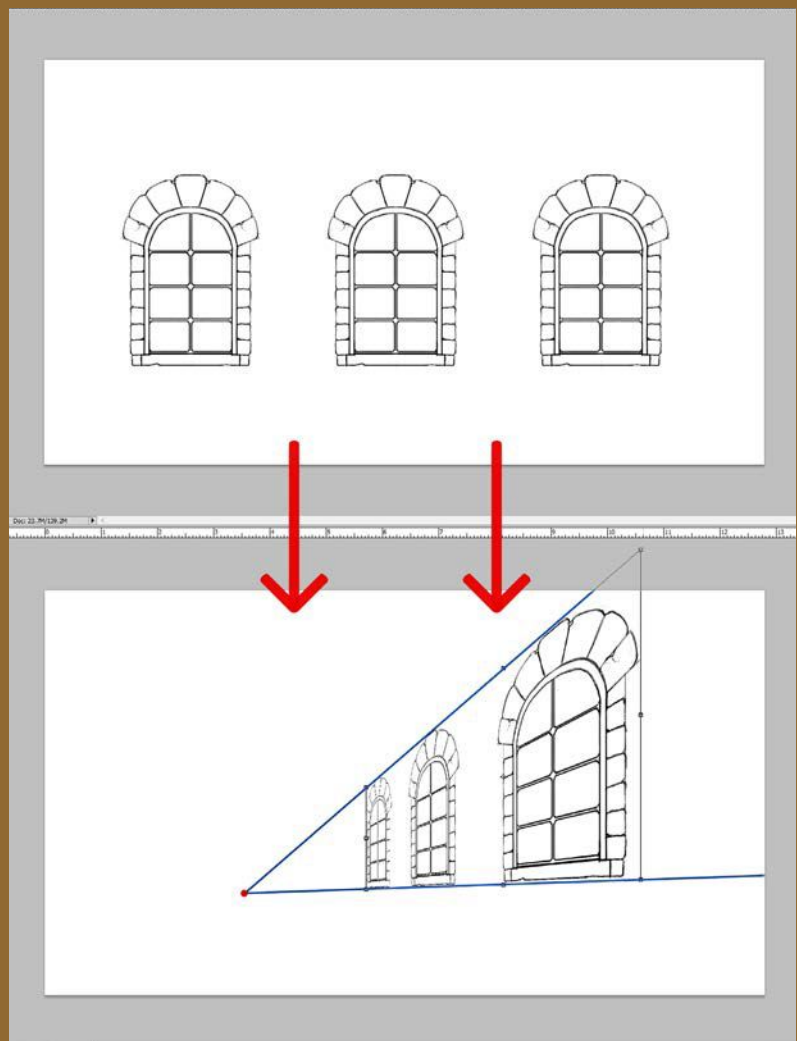
**“I like to try out a wide range of angles so I can fully explore all possibilities and ultimately come up with something that works best for the narrative”**

**06 Sketching out your options:** Before plowing ahead, it's always good to sketch out a few thumbnails, this way you can be sure to start your image off on the right foot. I like to try out a wide range of angles so I can fully explore all possibilities and ultimately come up with something that works best for the narrative. At this stage I'm not worried about accuracy. I loosely scribble out an idea until it begins to resemble something I like. Then I go back and rough in the perspective with help from the horizon line and vanishing point; if I like it I'll move on to the next step and refine the perspective using paths. ►

## ⚡ PRO TIPS

### Using the Transform tool for measurements

There will be times when you have same sized objects that need to be placed in perspective. A good example of this would be windows on a building. Each window is the same size, as is the distance between them. This can be tricky because as the windows recede towards the horizon line they will appear to get closer and closer together. Beginners will often guess on how close each window should be, not knowing that there is a way to measure this, which can get quite technical. Fortunately there is an easier way! With the Skew tool (Edit > Transform > Skew) you can have Photoshop do the hard work for you. First create the plane in 2D then select the Transform tool (Ctrl+T). Right-click on the selection and choose Skew, then it is just a matter of lining up the transform box with your perspective lines!





## 07 Using paths to create perspective

**lines:** To create perspective lines in Photoshop I create paths using the Pen tool (P); it takes a little bit of know-how to use effectively but is very easy once you get the hang of it. First select the Pen tool, and then pick the Line tool (U) in the menu above. Make sure the Paths option is selected then simply draw out your perspective lines. If you decide to change your vanishing point you can select the old points by holding Ctrl while selecting with the Pen tool, and you will be able to move them to their new location.

When I am happy with the perspective lines' location I make a new layer and stroke the path by right-clicking on the Stroke path from the Path panel pop-up. The stroke will imitate the size of your brush so make sure it is set to the size you want before stroking the paths. Now I have a grid that I can overlay on top of my painting! If you want to create another set of perspective lines, simply create a new paths layer and repeat the process.

## 08 Irregular architecture:

Structures don't always line up with each other; in fact it would be very odd if they did. This is especially true when it comes to complex scenes such as ruins or villages. So what do you do when nothing shares a common vanishing point? The foreground structures in the example are angled

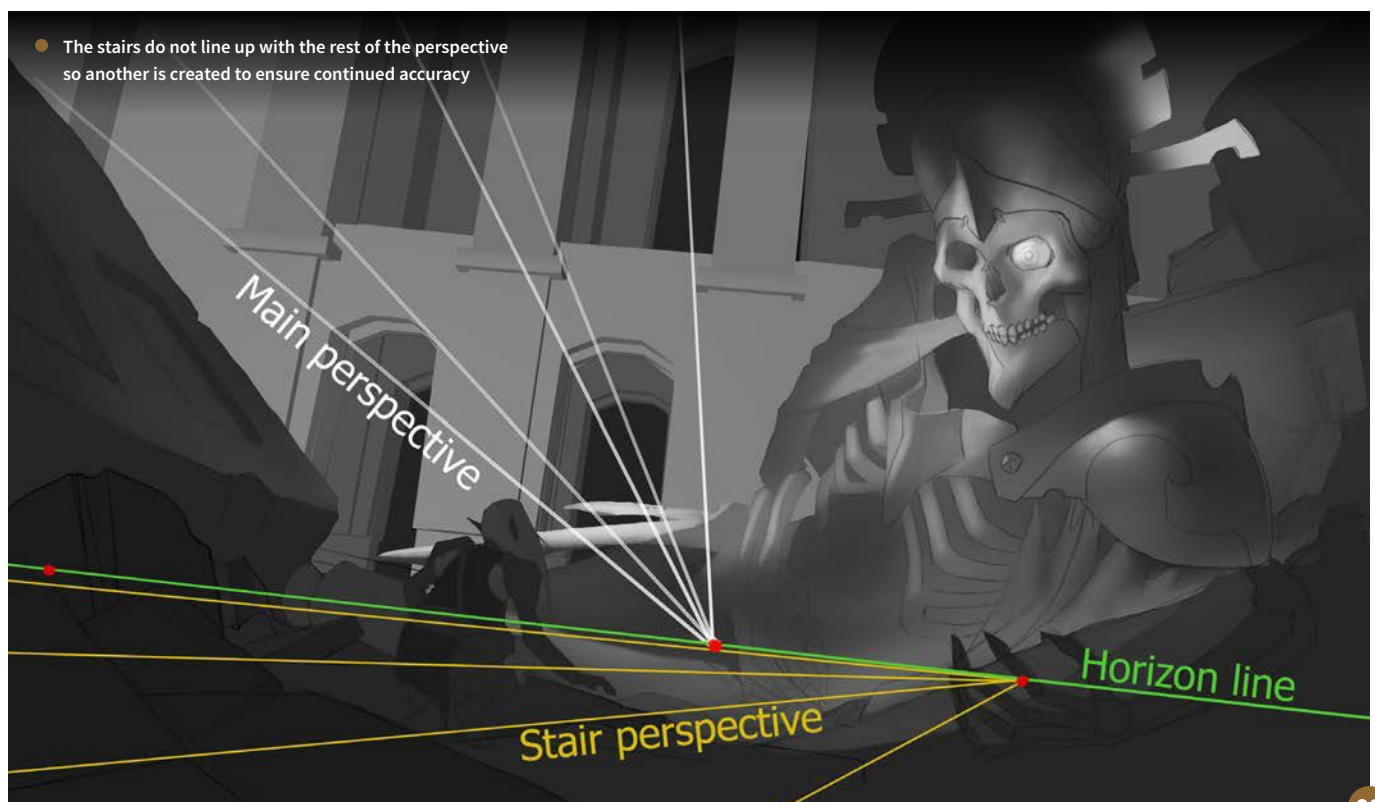
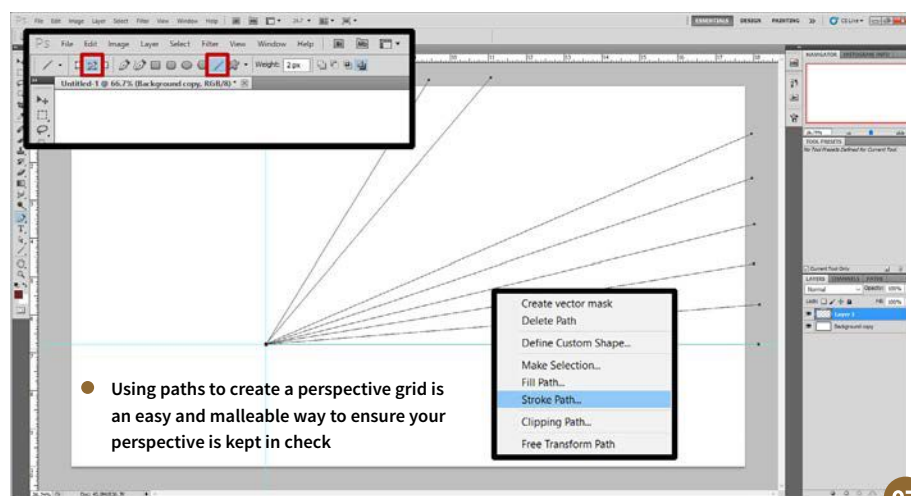
differently and do not align with the rest of the perspective, so I treat them as a new perspective with their own vanishing point. No matter how many perspectives you have in a scene, there should always be a dominant perspective that the others reside within, this way the viewers can identify which elements are off-kilter. If all the perspectives are fighting for attention then the image will break apart and the viewer will have trouble understanding what is going on.

## 09 Using 3D software:

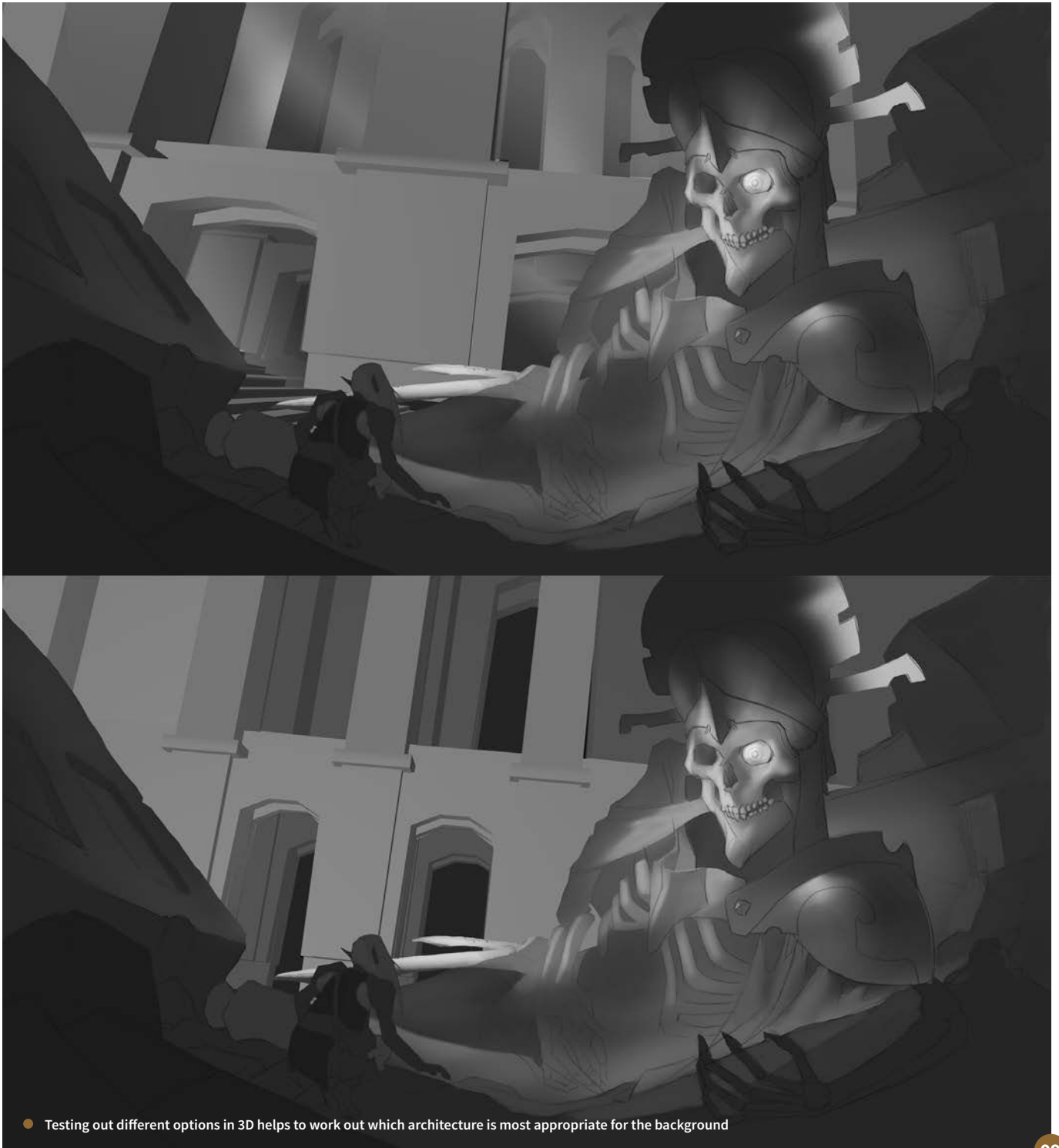
Nowadays it's pretty easy to get your hands on free 3D software which is great for those who want to jump in and create complex perspectives without the tedium of traditional methods. With

programs such as SketchUp or Blender you can compose elaborate scenes quickly and effectively making it a crucial tool in today's industry. Please note that I have added this towards the end of the article because it is still very important to understand how perspective works. If you skip straight to using 3D without proper perspective basics you will be making decisions without a true understanding of what you are doing, effectively making your scene a hit or miss.

Having in depth knowledge of a subject will always yield stronger, more purposeful results. Another benefit of 3D is the ability to test out different angles and lighting. In the example you can see how I use the strengths of 3D to figure out







● Testing out different options in 3D helps to work out which architecture is most appropriate for the background

09

the most suitable shot. When I use 3D I generally keep it pretty simple. I'm pretty decent free hand so spending too much time modeling objects just eats up time that could be spent painting; this of course is just a personal preference.

**10 Bringing it all together:** By using the techniques provided throughout this article I have reached a point where I am happy with what I have, and the thumbnails helped me decide on which perspective would work

best. Challenging angles have been resolved and an atmosphere has been introduced to add a sense of depth to the scene.

Perspective can be challenging when you are first starting out but like with all things, a little practice goes a long way. By following the rules of perspective I can be confident that my image has the sturdy framework necessary to build from. In part three we will be looking at value; I hope to see you there! ●

## The Artist



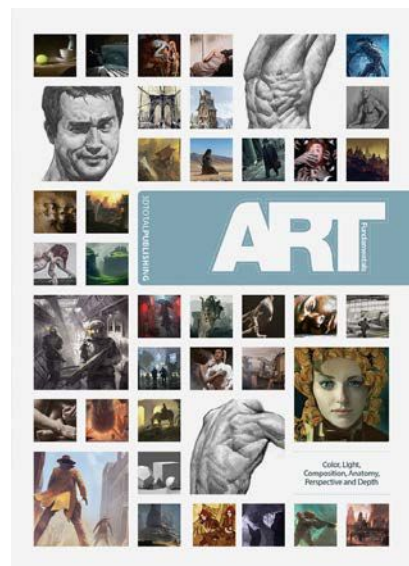
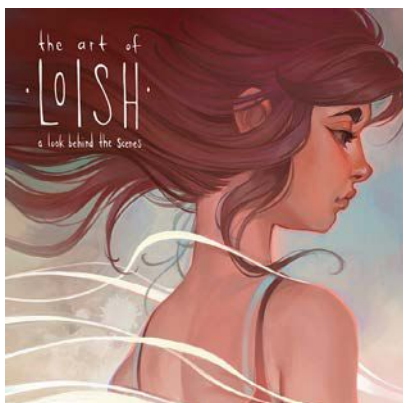
**James Wolf Strehle**  
patreon.com/jameswolf



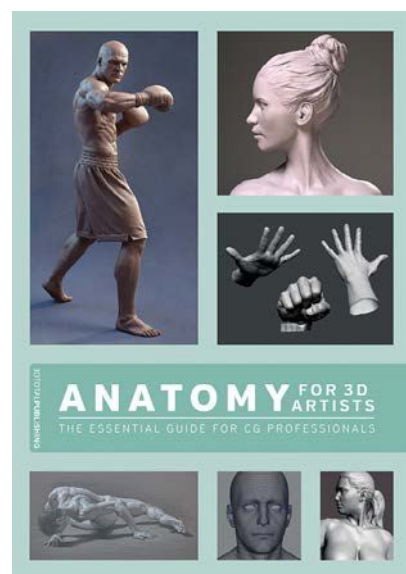
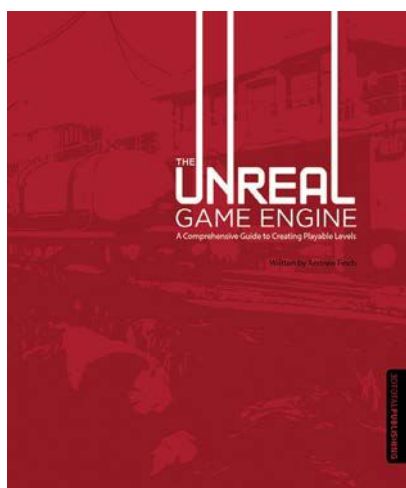
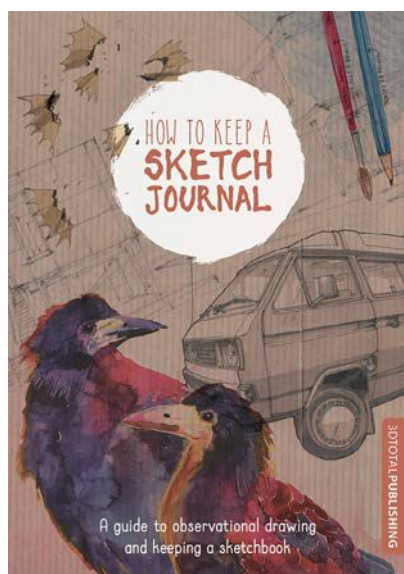












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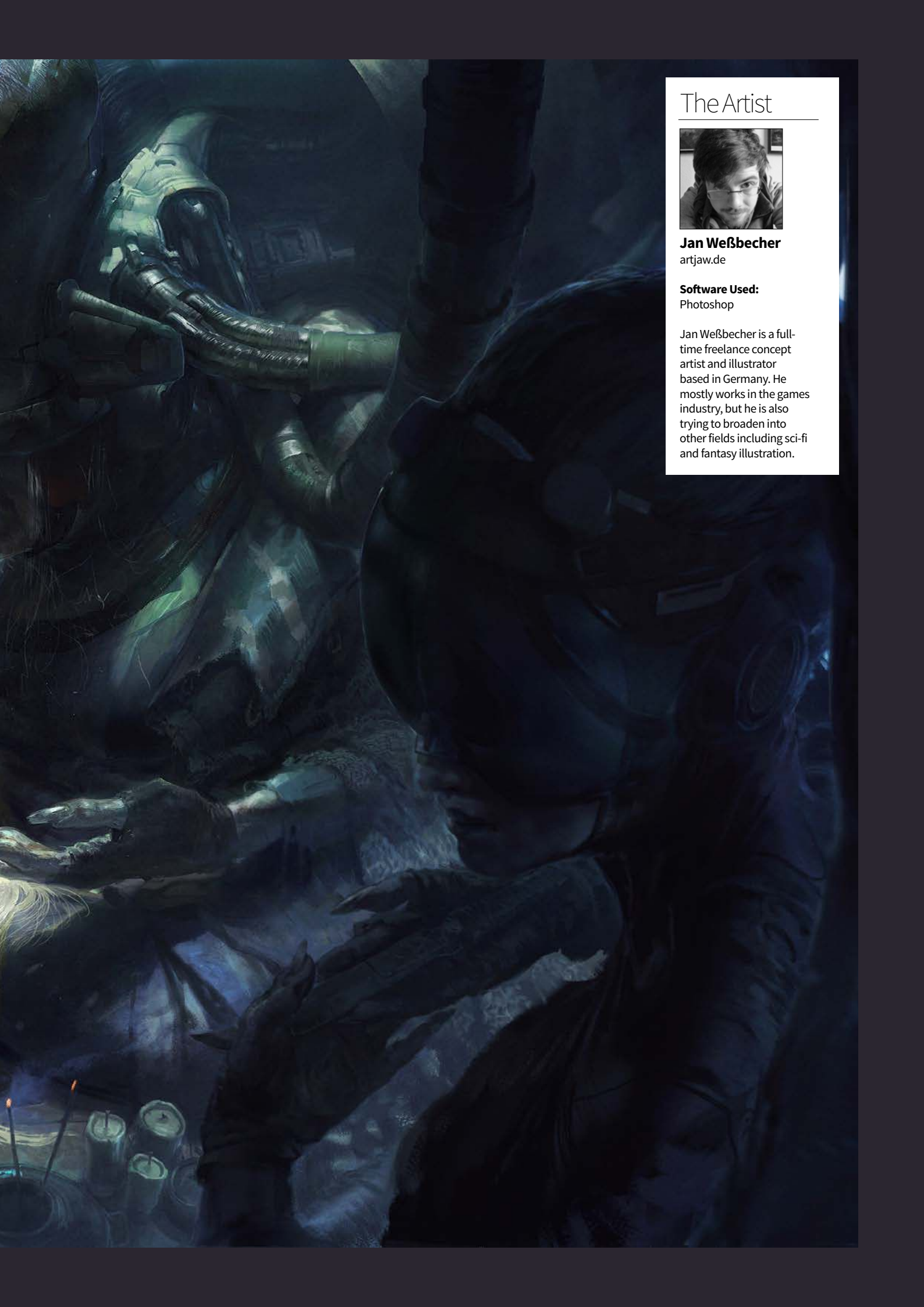


# Making Of *Celsius 13 - Crone*

Learn how to paint a moody and melancholic narrative driven illustration with Jan Weißbecher ▶

All images © Jan Weißbecher





## The Artist



**Jan Weißbecher**

[artjaw.de](http://artjaw.de)

**Software Used:**

Photoshop

Jan Weißbecher is a full-time freelance concept artist and illustrator based in Germany. He mostly works in the games industry, but he is also trying to broaden into other fields including sci-fi and fantasy illustration.

## Learn how to paint a moody and melancholic narrative driven illustration with Jan Weißbecher...

Hello there! I'm going to show you the painting process I used for creating this piece. I had a very lengthy sketch process beforehand, but we will mostly exclude that here because it would go beyond the scope of this feature. I will however talk about some crucial decisions I made during the painting process and highlight some techniques I used.

All the techniques and decisions I made combined to get the certain filmic look I was striving for. My main goal with this piece was to show an intimate scene, like a snapshot out of a dark, futuristic movie. The setting is from a personal project of mine called *Celsius 13* and takes places on a colony planet that has regressed back to a darker civilization, after being abandoned by Earth.

All of the informed design decisions I took in the painting led to moody lighting and a dirty, smoky setting. Color seems to be drained from the faces and a general air of desperation reigns, but a small spark of hope still lingers.

**"I like drawing and I don't mind spending time getting the line art to a point where it can stand on its own"**

**01 Initial drawing:** As mentioned before, I spent quite some time on the drawing beforehand. This is actually the second fully fleshed out drawing I did of the scene before I started the painting. I was interested in doing both as a painting; however, this drawing better represented the things I wanted to achieve. Going into this kind of detail and doing expressive linework, and even shading,

is not really necessary but I like drawing and I don't mind spending time getting the line art to a point where it can stand on its own. Usually, anything that lays down the big shapes and gives you a good indication on how the composition will work is going to be usable.

For me, the drawing allowed me to quickly define details, such as the wrinkled face of the old woman; also, I could come back to it later to check the painting against the line art.

**02 Setting up the lighting:** For this step, I went in with the intention of trying



The final drawing took a while, but it was worth it

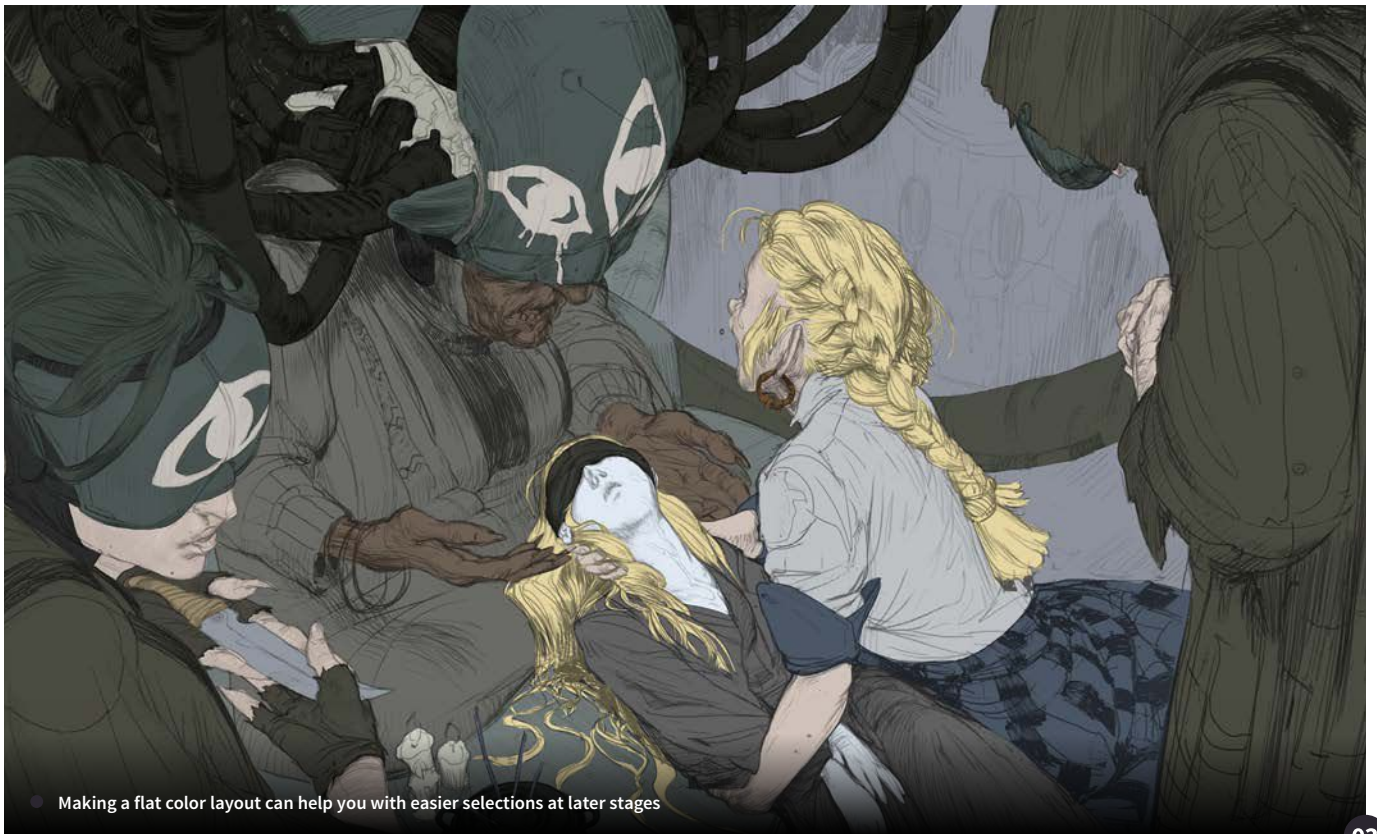
01



The chosen lighting setup – one of about half a dozen!

02





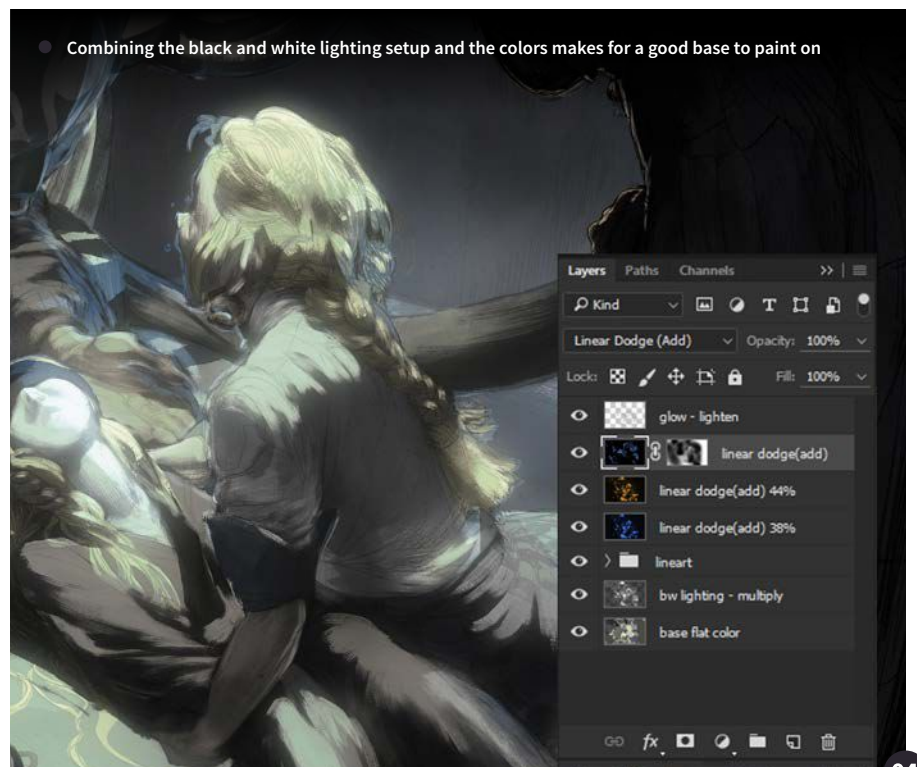
03

out different lighting setups before I decided on the final one. Using a rather broad and bristly brush, as well as a soft round brush (so I didn't get bogged down with details or shading) I quickly laid down the main light directions and some reflected light. I ended up with about six different black and white lighting layouts. Some of these were a result of combining previous ones by using Opacity and Blending modes on the layers stacked atop each other.

Another possibility would be to use a flat tone approach using an ink brush or the Lasso tool to get sharp edges. It really depends on your preference as well your intended result. Since the end result of the painting wasn't supposed have a cleanly shaded look, I avoided making perfectly defined pools of light.

**03 Basic colors:** I usually think to myself that I will stick to my original color choices I make at the start of a painting but often it changes as painting progresses, nonetheless, I decided to set up a very basic color layout to start the painting.

Using the Lasso tool and sharp edged brushes I defined areas of different flat color. If you want, you can keep all these on separate layers for later use, either for easy masking/selections, or to

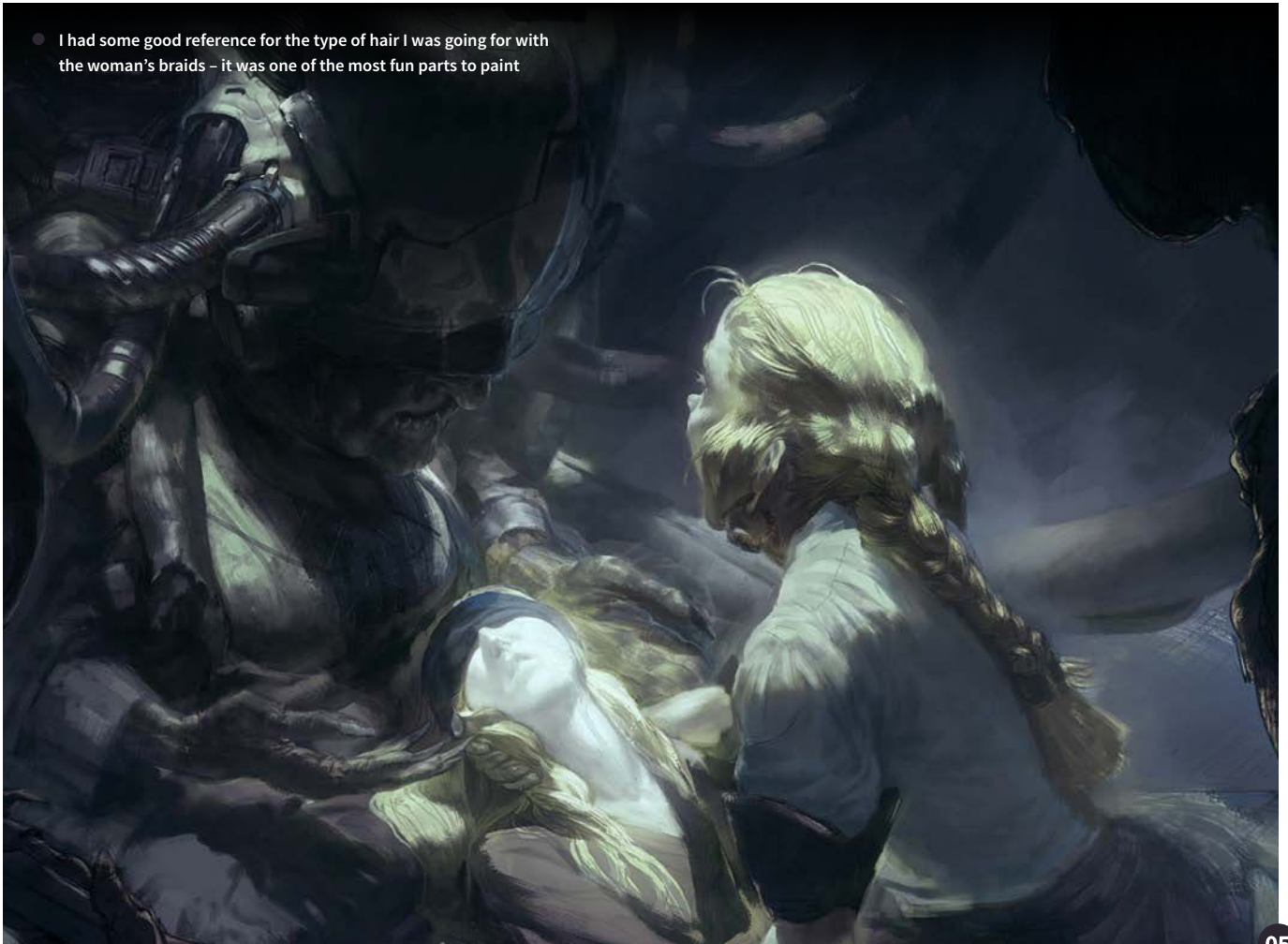


04

paint on top of them – that is a lot of clutter for my liking so I kept it to one layer for this piece. I keep the line art on top as a separate layer to remind me of what needs to go where. In hindsight I think I should have spent much longer on this step than I did in the end as it would have made the later stages much smoother.

**04 Combine lighting and color:** Now we are getting to the more juicy parts. I used the black and white layer on top of the color layer set to Multiply mode (Layer > Layer Style > Blending Options...) then I made two copies of the black and white layer as well as some of the other discarded black and ►

- I had some good reference for the type of hair I was going for with the woman's braids – it was one of the most fun parts to paint



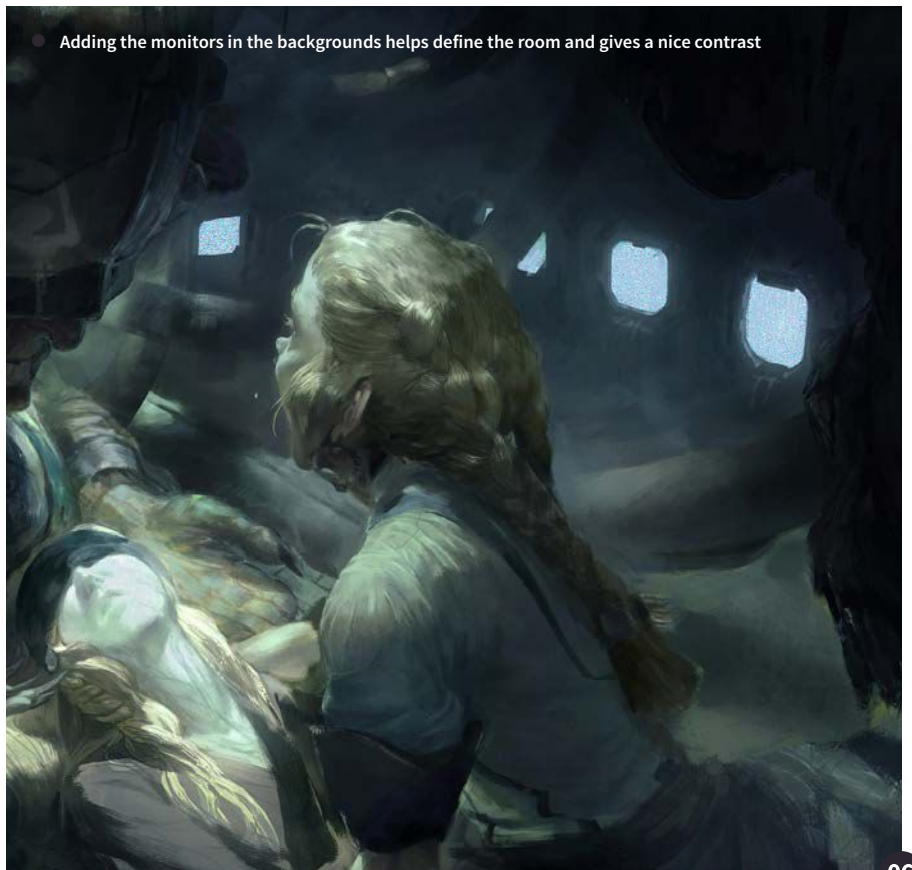
05

white layers (for example one which only had a rim light). I colorized the copies in different hues using the Hue/Saturation adjustment panel (Ctrl+U), then I put the colorized layers on top and set them to Linear dodge (Layer > Layer Style > Blending Options...).

After playing around with the opacities and some layer masks, I got to a setup that worked well for me. To add a little bit of glow to the whole thing, I used a merged copy in which I selected the light areas, deleted the rest, blurred it using Gaussian blur filter (Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur...) and set the layer to Lighten and lowered the opacity.

**05 Starting the painting process:** Now I had a solid base I could begin painting on, I needed to work on the focus areas of the image, such as the woman's hair, the face of the girl, and the helmet of the crone with all the technical stuff. Throughout the process I always try to see if I need to fix some of the anatomy, and sure enough, there were quite a few things I needed to fix right up until the end.

- Adding the monitors in the backgrounds helps define the room and gives a nice contrast



06





Carefully controlling your values is hard, but is very important when working on dark scenes

07

At this point, I was mainly concerned with laying a solid base on the crone's helmet and defining the girl's face. Specifically for the technical parts of the helmet, I collected many references of old engines and grimy machinery. I tend to find lots of inspiration in doing a round of reference collection right at the start of the painting process.

**06 Defining space:** I do tend to jump around a lot when painting, so with every step, the whole painting progresses a little bit, for example by adding more saturation to the colors and depth to the background.

However, in this step there were some larger changes. I was feeling rather dissatisfied with how the background progressed and was constantly changing it until I decided to add monitors displaying grainy static to more clearly define the room in which the scene takes place.

The displays were easy to block in, I just painted a light-blue flat shape, added noise (Filter > Noise > Add Noise...) then added a glow by blurring a copy of the display on top of itself and setting it to Lighten (Layer > Layer Style > Blending Options...) These didn't make it to the final image, but the idea to create more space by lighting up the background proved to be a good decision in the end.

**07 Pushing back values:** One thing that becomes rather important when working in a low key image like this is the separation of elements. For example, the woman in the foreground holding the dagger is barely visible; she is almost just a shape in dark colors. However, the viewer should still be able to clearly separate her from the elements behind her and read the shape as a head. By painting a ►

## ⚡ PRO TIPS

### Telling a story

In my Illustration work, I am always concerned with having a narrative; I think that pretty much all work can benefit from thinking deeply about what kind of story the viewer will experience when he looks at your art. It's nice to have an artwork that blasts you away with technical excellence, but if that piece also touches you on an emotional level, then I think it gets elevated to a whole other level. This doesn't necessarily mean having a clear narrative as if it exists in a book or a movie. It can be an abstract thing as well, although I personally go for the "obvious" story telling more often than not.

- You shouldn't be afraid to make necessary changes even this late in the painting process



soft gradient behind her, I made her more visible without pushing her into focus too much. Another important adjustment is the added color contrast on the girl's clothing and the bowl with the pink liquid. By doing this, the girl clearly stands out as the main focus of the image and at the same time becomes more connected to the crone character. Using color contrasts like this can be very effective when conveying narrative in an illustration.

**“Adding the windows also allowed me to make the blue rim light playing along the edge of the woman's hair much stronger without it standing out”**

**08 Windows from monitors:** Finally! This in my opinion is the most important change I made while painting. I realized that changing the small monitors into larger vertical windows would allow me to show the cables running through the room to cross in front of a light background, thus enhancing the

depth of the image. To make the windows I basically kept what I had painted for the monitors and just stretched their top part with transform (Ctrl+T) and painted over them.

Adding the windows also allowed me to make the blue rim light playing along the edge of

the woman's hair much stronger without it standing out. I also finally got to work on the clothing of the girl. Since it was supposed to be part of the focus point of the image, I added a lot more detail and more natural folds to it, but still kept the loose fitting feeling of it (like something a sick person might wear).

## ⚡ PRO TIPS

### Experimentation

Thanks to working digitally, we have the good fortune of being able to save backups. This also means that it is quite easy to just go nuts for a little bit and throw large changes around when you can't put your finger on why something isn't working. You might just find a solution to your problem, for example, midway through this piece I changed the width of my Image to make it feel less claustrophobic, and I could've just changed back whenever I wanted. This is a very powerful tool to have!

### On using reference

I'm pretty certain that this isn't the first time you will have heard this, but since I have to remind myself as well all the time: using references is very important and in a way it's similar to observing your environment and building a visual library. You just have it stored externally in addition to mentally, so you can always check when you forget what that one tree looked like that you photographed on your last vacation.



- Depth of field like I used it here is a very technical solution. It doesn't fit every style and it's important to know when to paint a soft edge by hand



09

**09 Depth of field:** Finishing up! After adding the last touches, such as a finer spread on the girl's hair and small details like glowing incense sticks, details on fabric, and adding window blinders for a more lived in feeling; I decided to add a depth of field effect.

Since I hadn't kept all my elements on separate layers, I now had to cut the image into layers again (you reap what you sow!). Afterwards it was easy to apply a Lens blur (Filter > Blur > Lens Blur...) to the separate layers, each with their own value (more blur for windows in the background, less for foreground elements).

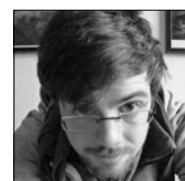
Additionally, for the focal points I used the Unsharp Mask filter (Filter > Sharpen > Unsharp Mask...) to get a crisper definition of details. You have to be careful with that however,

for some brush setups or styles it might produce a very grainy result, or look worse than without. Ideally, you should use a layer mask to apply it only where it is needed.

**10 Final color corrections:** Usually I have a rather extensive color correction setup at the end of my process, because I'm never really satisfied, and I tweak it a lot. In this case I tried unifying the colors more and adding a warmer blue to the unfocused elements. I used a combination of Adjustment Layers (with additional layer masks of course), mostly Curves, and a Gradient Map set to noise on low opacity and selective color. Ideally, you don't use too many of these adjustments because it might throw your values out of balance or make the colors too uniform. The finishing touch for this image was adding film grain. One method to get

a decent grain is making a 50% gray flat color layer, then applying the add noise filter and blurring it with a Gaussian blur set to something around 1.5. Afterwards set the layer to overlay and adjust the opacity, and with that I was finished! ●

## The Artist



**Jan Weißbecher**  
artjaw.de











beginner's guide to  
**digitalpainting**  
in photoshop

BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO DIGITAL PAINTING IN PHOTOSHOP:

# Digital painting using photographs

by Alex Figini

Discover how Alex Figini transforms stock photographs into a digital painting using quick and easy techniques ▶

All images © Alex Figini



## The Artist

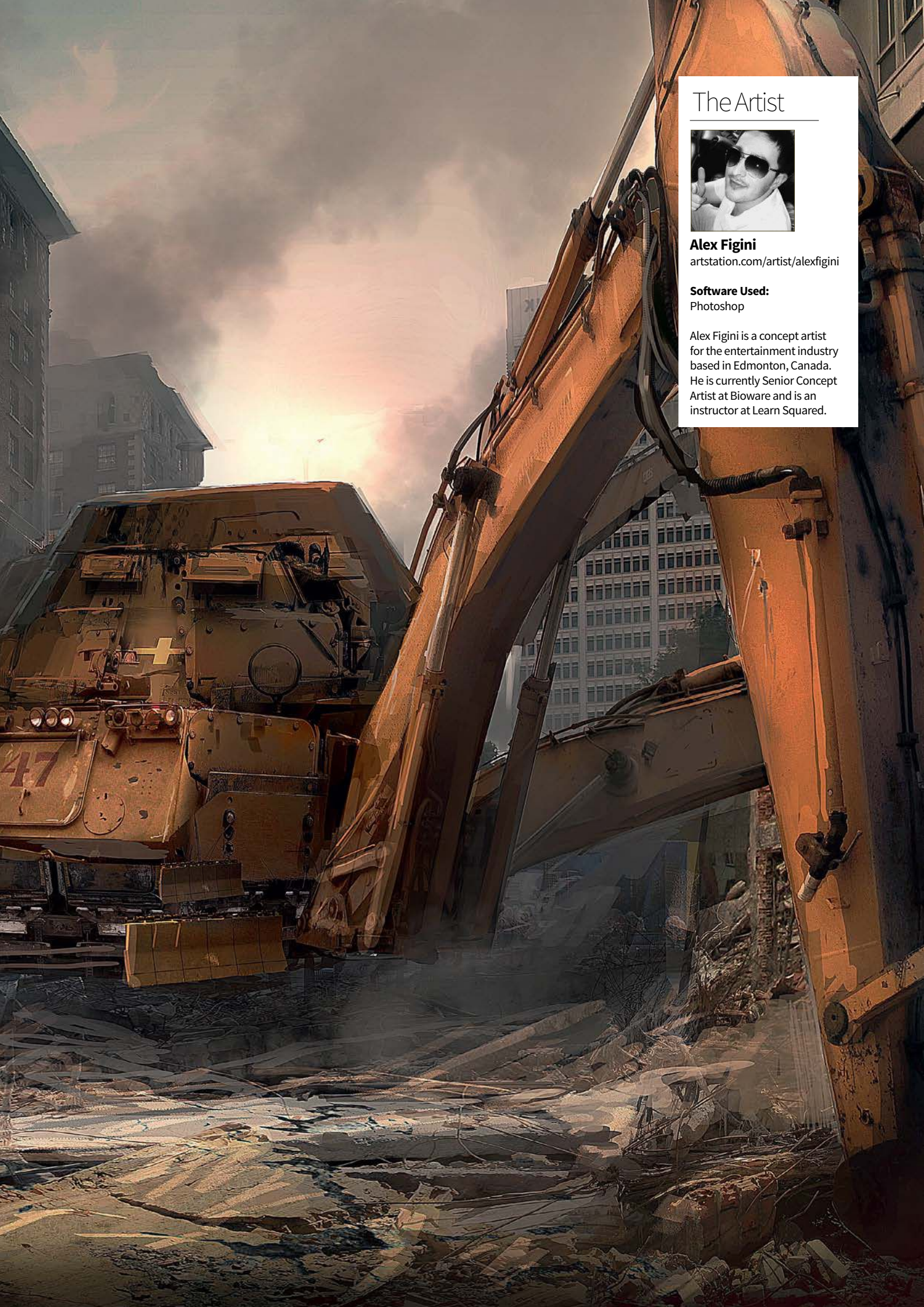


**Alex Figini**

[artstation.com/artist/alexfigini](http://artstation.com/artist/alexfigini)

**Software Used:**  
Photoshop

Alex Figini is a concept artist for the entertainment industry based in Edmonton, Canada. He is currently Senior Concept Artist at Bioware and is an instructor at Learn Squared.





In this tutorial I will show you a relatively quick and easy way to create a painting with the use of some stock photos.

### Creating perspective and composition

Begin by opening Photoshop, creating a large canvas and setting a neutral background color. I usually use a warm, mid-gray as a base as opposed to the default white as this can be a little stark. I find this a good way to work as you can add contrast (light and shadow) quite easily.

Next, create a new separate layer for the sketch that will form the base of your image. To create a new layer press Ctrl+Shift+N.

This is when you want to start to develop your idea. At this point I already have a rough idea of what I want to do: a giant spider mech in a ruined city environment. With this in mind I quickly sketch out the image, concentrating on the composition and overall balance. The brush you use isn't really that important at this stage, but I prefer to use a hard-edged brush as opposed to a soft-edged airbrush.

Your aim at this point should be to make some interesting shapes on the canvas and create a sense of depth by adding some perspective. It is also important to think about the silhouette of the main focus of the image; this should look cool and interesting.

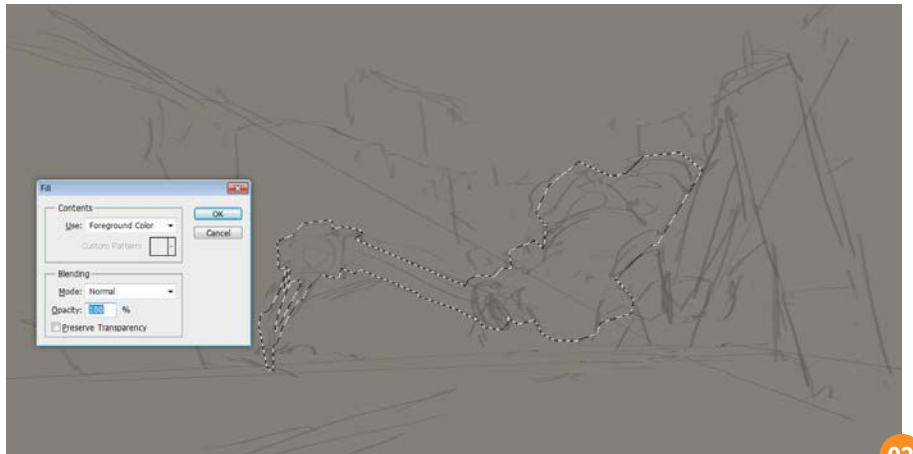
### Blocking the scene

With the basic sketch done, add another layer that you should use to block out the scene. I use the Polygon Lasso tool (L) to create a crisp shape to work from. In images 02 and 03 you can see the way that I have blocked in the mech. The black and white line signifies the selected area. When I am happy with my selection I fill the area with a mid/dark gray by pressing Shift+F5.

With the basic shape in place, use the same method to add some rough shapes to the background. In my case I have added some rough buildings. Although this method lacks detail and will eventually be discarded it does help me build a better image in my mind of where I am going (Fig.04). You may find this a useful step to start with.



01



02



03



04





05

### Adding textures

The next step is to gather some photo textures from the free resources at 3dtotal.com. These real-world photos are very useful and help add some believability to the image. They also allow you to quickly achieve a high level of detail. This can be very useful if you are up against the clock. It is a good idea to start building up your own resource folders so you have quick access to stock images, textures and so on (05).

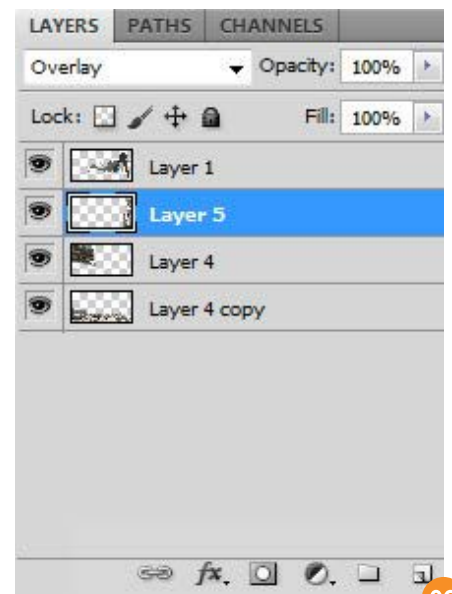
### Using the Lasso tool and blending

The next step is to start selecting the elements of the photos that you want to use with the Lasso tool. You can copy the area by pressing Ctrl+C and paste it onto your

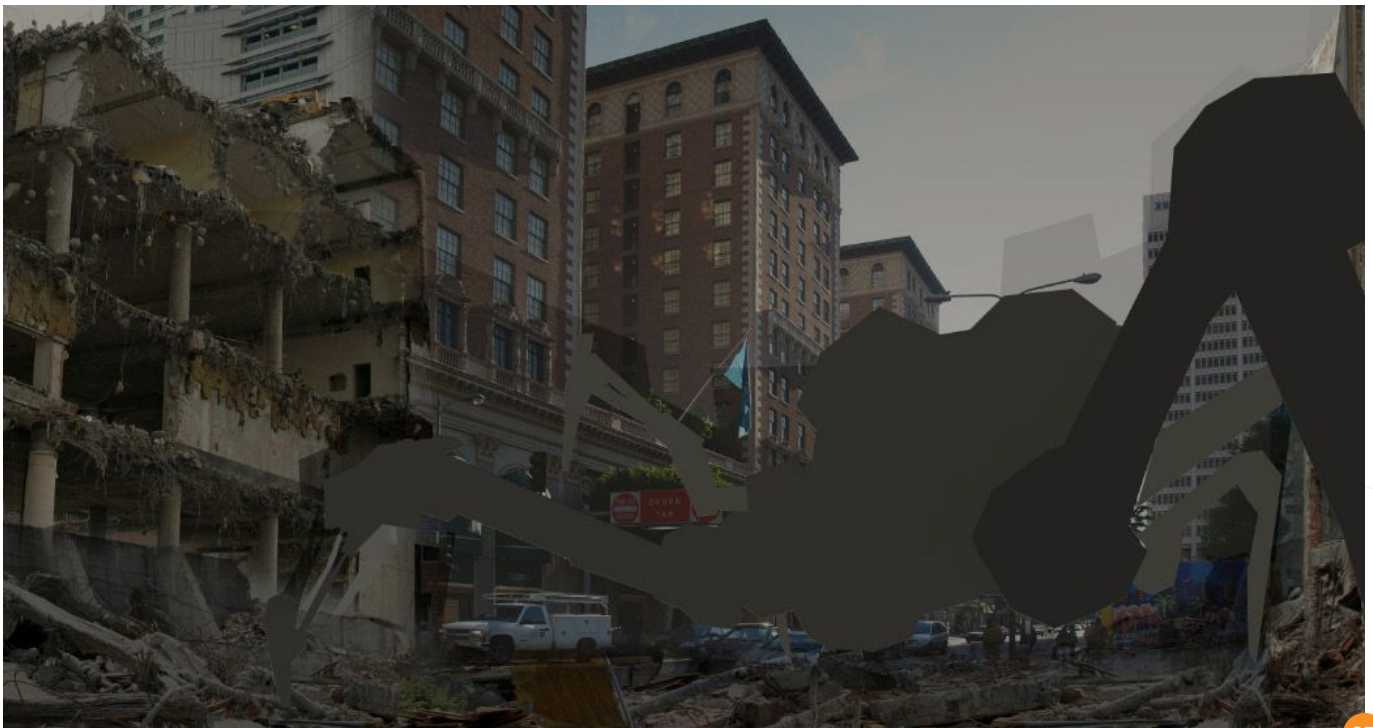
canvas by pressing Ctrl+V. Start with the background. In my case I added the ruined buildings and the rubble-strewn street.

When applying the photos to your canvas, cycle through the blending modes in the Layers tab to see what works best. I usually settle on Overlay blending mode, but you can always go back and change things later (06).

The aim at this point is to create a level of harmony where nothing really jumps out at you as being wrong. Adjusting the colors and contrast of the various elements will help them sit in the scene nicely. I often find keeping a limited range in both your color palette and values will help at this stage (07).



06



07



### Adding foreground elements

With the background elements in place you can start to begin work on the foreground – in this case the mech. You should have all of your images in a place that you can access easily. At this point I had a canvas with all my references on it and decided to use the arms of a digger as the legs of the mech (08).

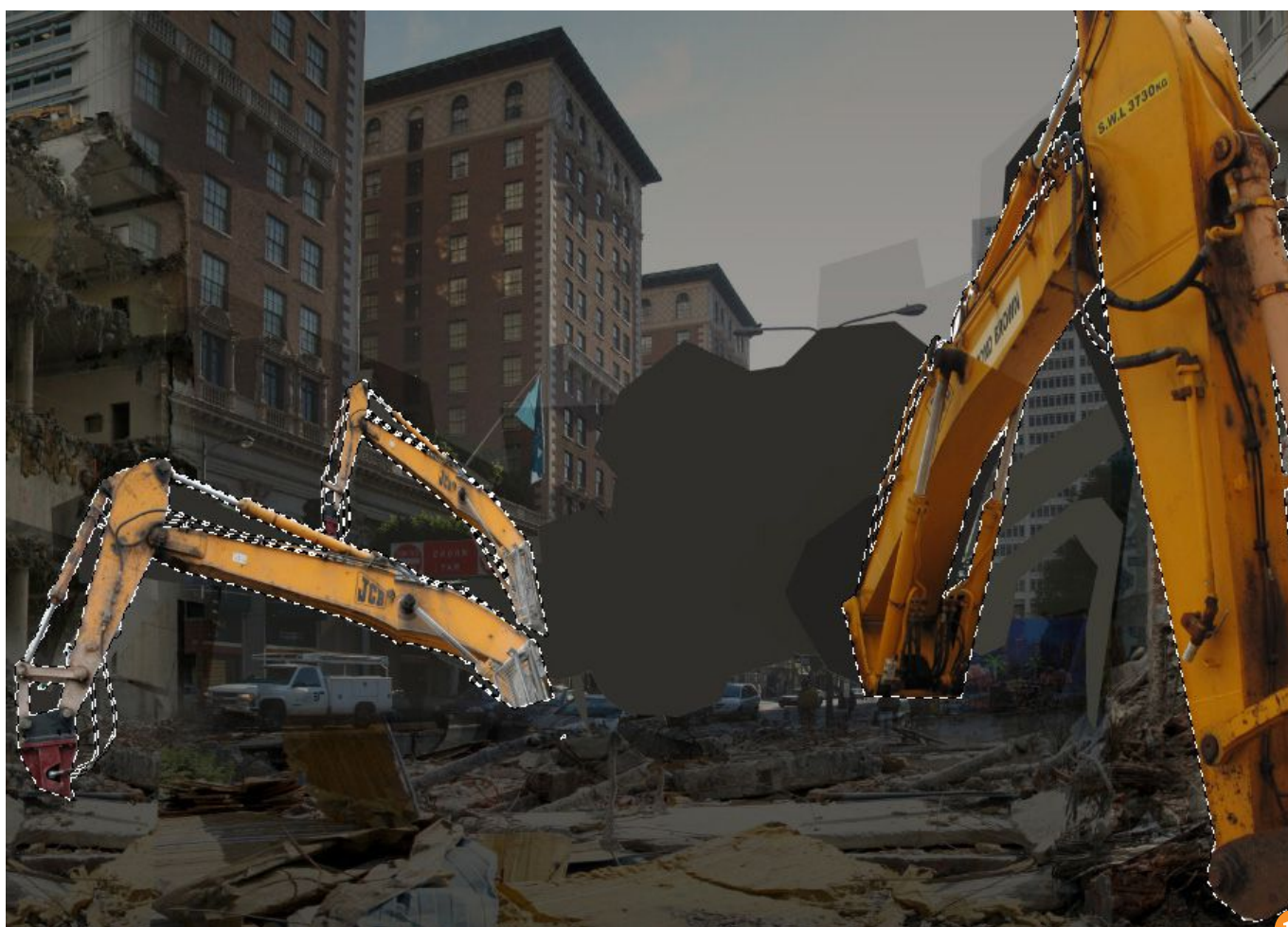
Make your selection from the references and paste it into your image. You may need to transform the image a little to make



08

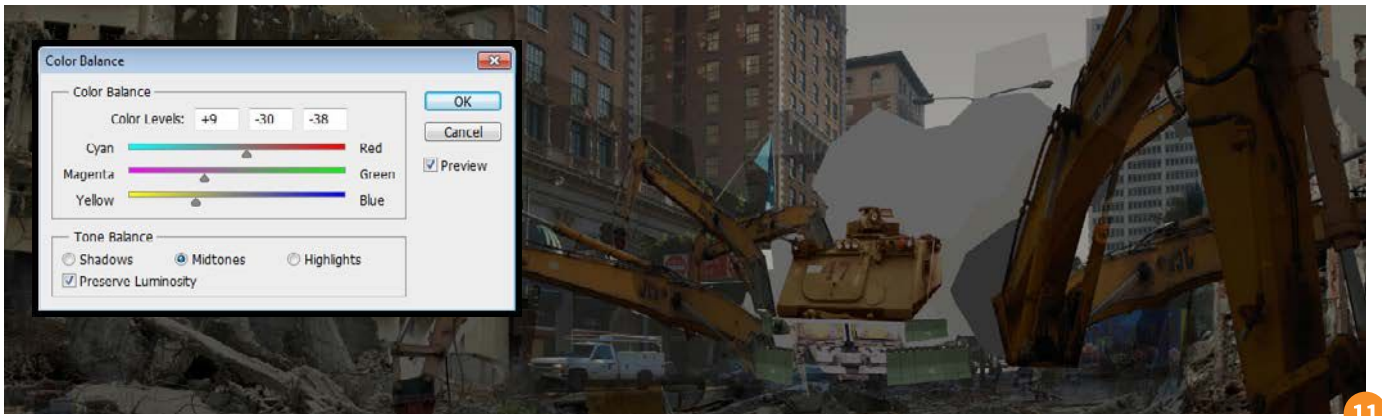


09



10





11



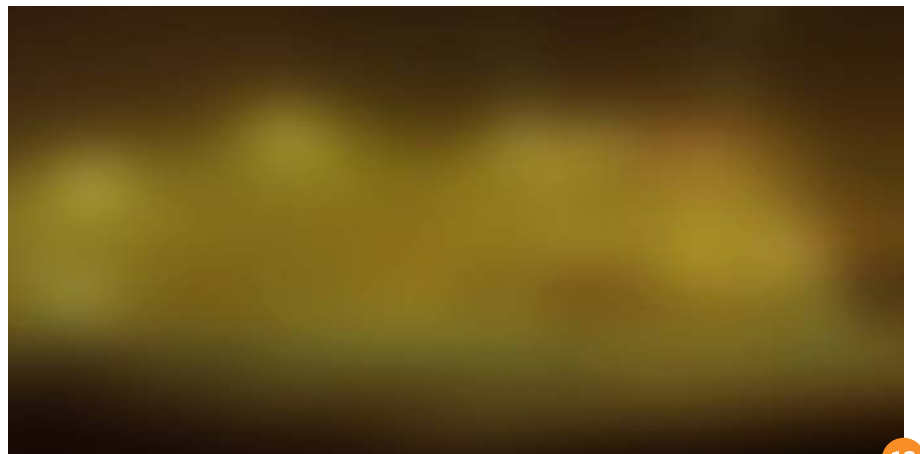
12

it fit. To transform the layer or selection press **Ctrl+T**. To bring up the various transform options, right-click the active transformation and a set of options will appear (09–10).

With the beginning of the foreground in place the next step is to start to add more photos. The same principle applies here as it did with the background. Play with the blending modes until you find the correct mode to make the elements work well together. In the case of my image I also used tools such as Color Balance, Levels and Curves to balance the colors and values (11). These tools can be accessed by going to the Image menu option and then going to Adjustments (12).

#### Lighting, color and layer masks

In the case of my image the basics were in place, but the image was very flat and monotone. My next goal was to play with the color palette and establish some lighting (16). Add a color wash to the image in Soft Light blending mode. This is to help gel all the elements together (13–14).

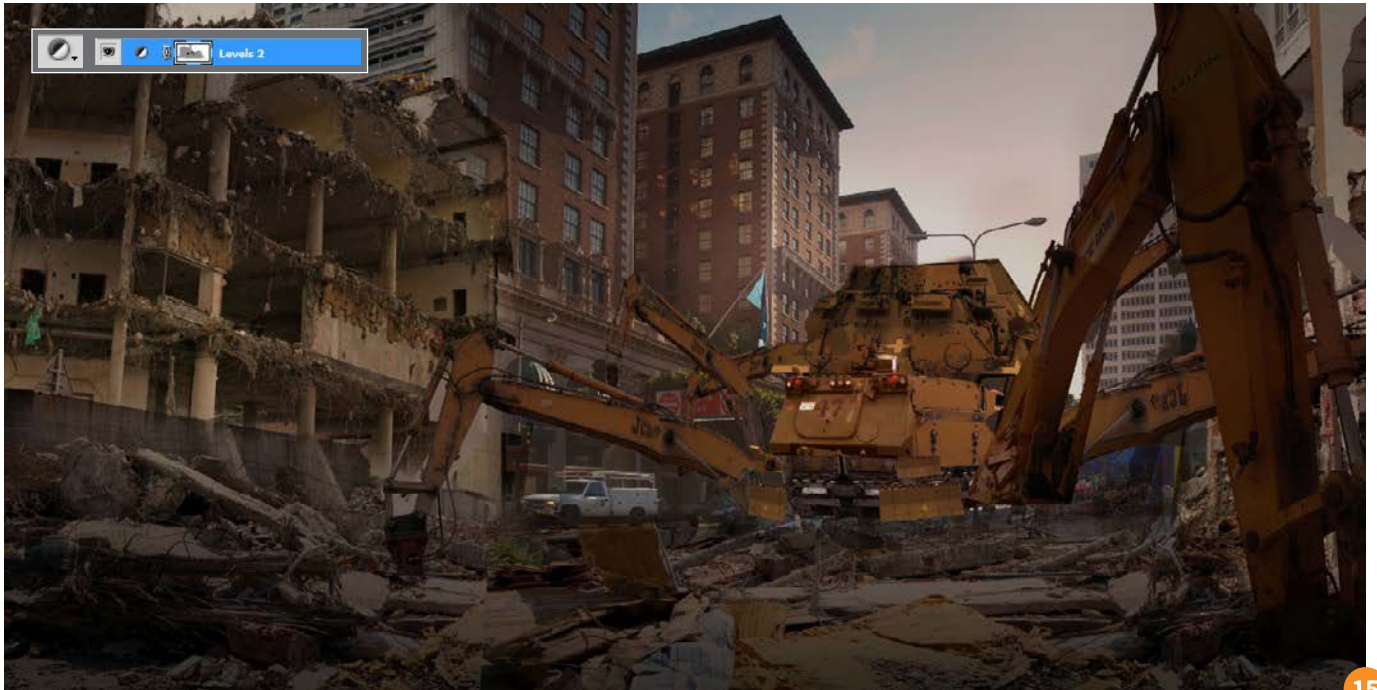


13



14





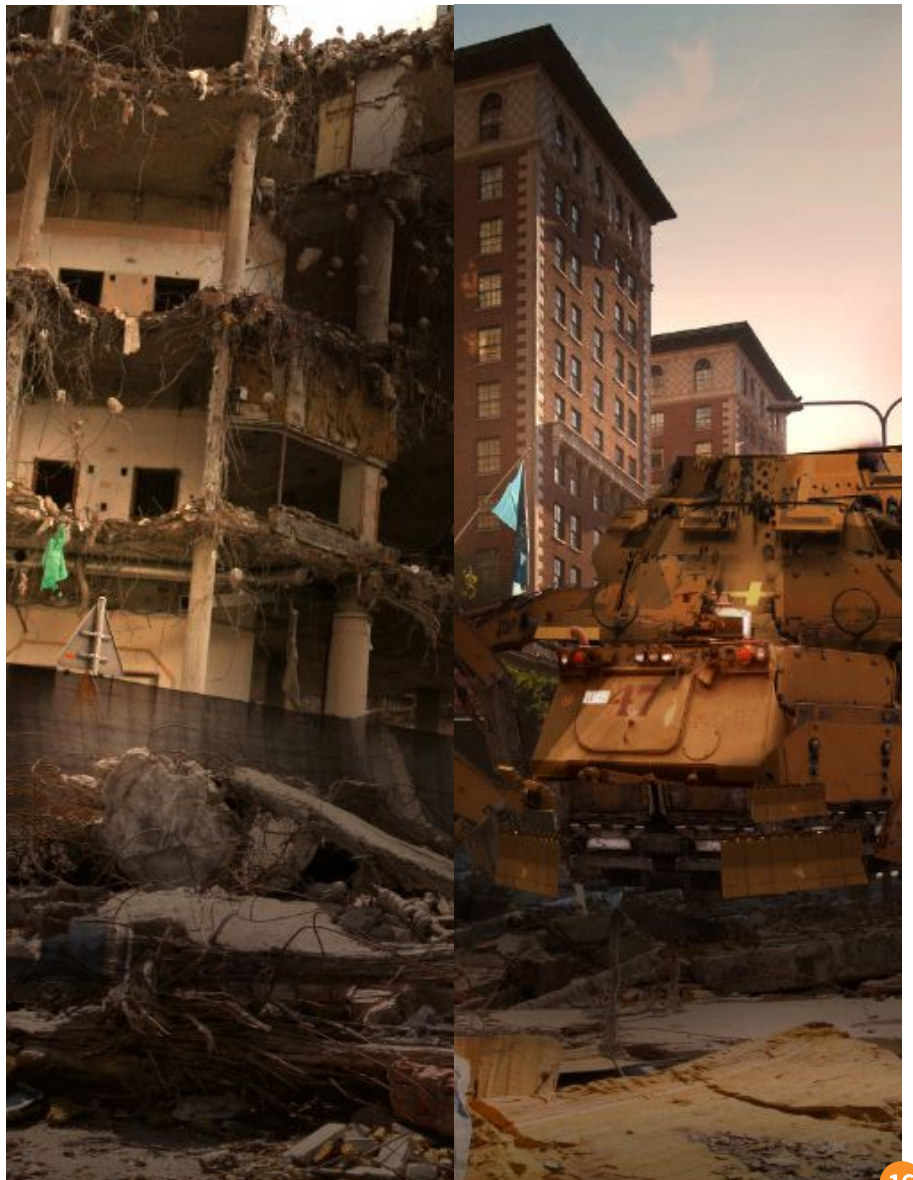
15

Next use Levels (found under Adjustments in the Image tab, as mentioned previously) to balance the image and give it a natural daylight feel (15). As you can see in the case of my image there is still a lack of contrast and directional light. To help add this, set up another Levels adjustment layer (you can find this on the bottom of your Layers tab – see the top left insert in 16). My intention for this adjustment layer is to boost the light in certain areas of the picture. When applied, it will initially affect the whole image, although this isn't a problem as it has a layer mask. Use the layer mask to paint the areas you want in shadow (using black as the color), or paint in the areas you want in sunlight (using white) (16).

#### Final adjustments

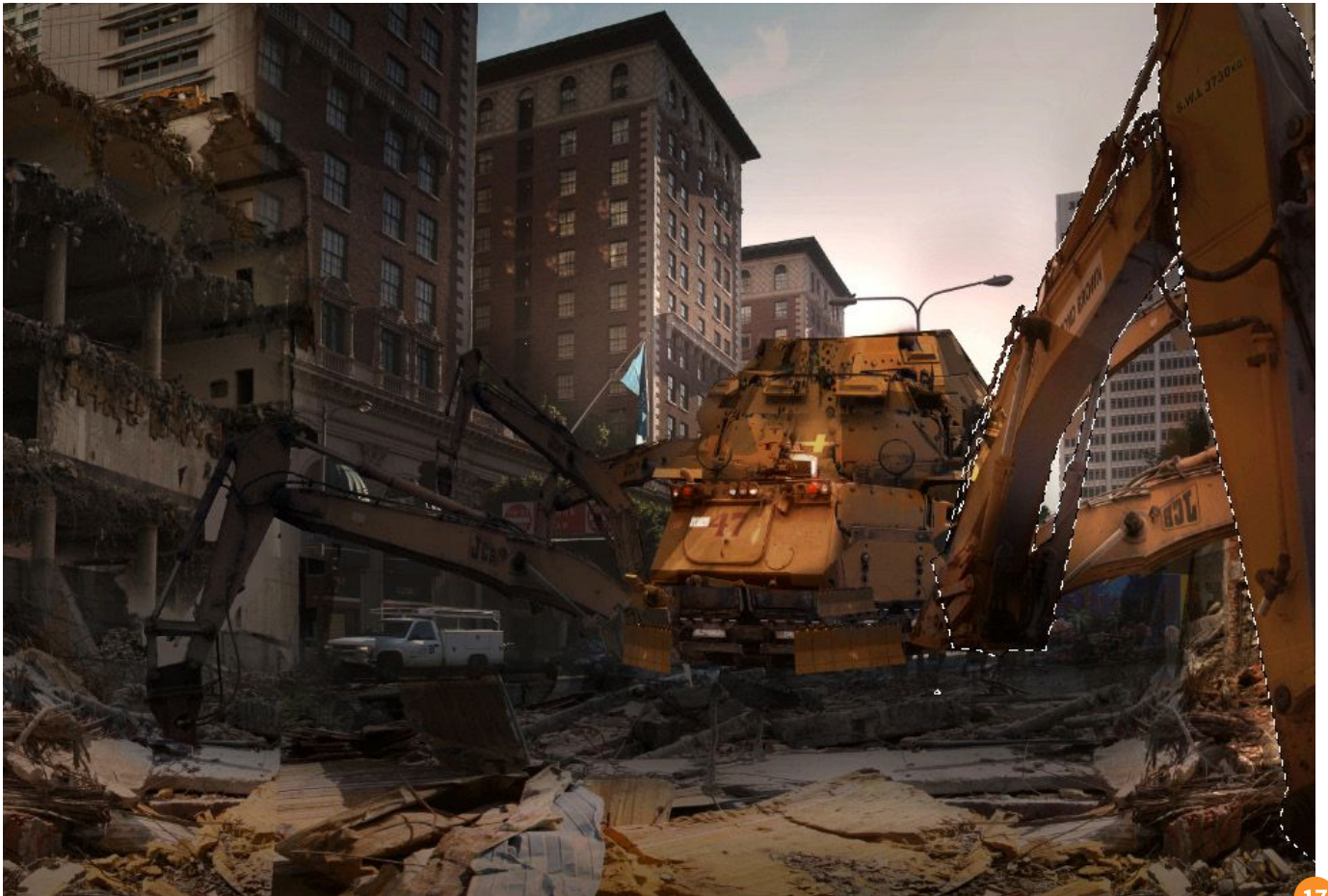
After adding some basic light to the image you can turn your attention to the colors again. Use the various adjustment layers to reduce the overall saturation and also boost the blues in the shadows using the Levels tool (17).

You can then flatten the image and begin over-painting. At this point you can cover up the mistakes you made earlier by adding more lighting, atmosphere and detail (18). When you are happy with the overall result apply an Unsharp Mask (found under the Filter tab) to really help bring out all the details and highlights.



16





17



18



## The Artist



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